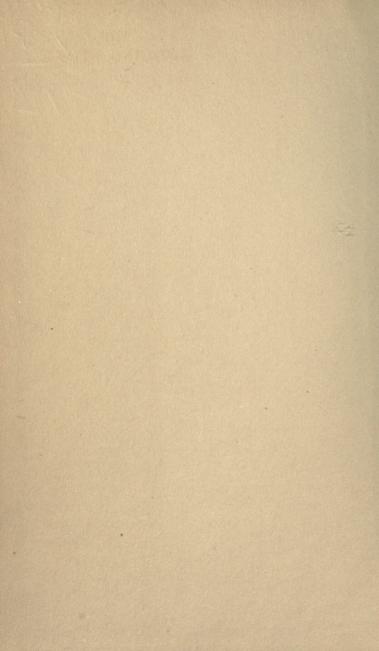
THE ROLLING STON





THE ROLLING STONE

NEW BORZOI NOVELS SPRING, 1920

PETER JAMESON

By Gilbert Frankau

THE SECRET BATTLE

By A. P. Herbert

THE CROSS PULL

By Hal G. Evarts

DELIVERANCE

By E. L. Grant Watson

THE TALLEYRAND MAXIM

By J. S. Fletcher

WHERE ANGELS FEAR TO TREAD By E. M. Forster

THE ROLLING STONE

A NOVEL

C. A. DAWSON-SCOTT



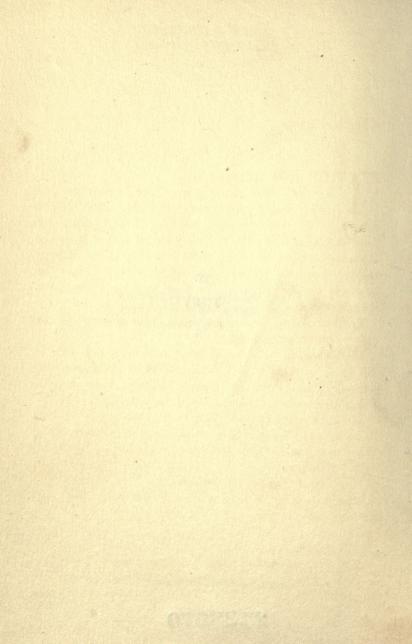
NEW YORK

ALFRED · A · KNOPF

MCMXX

COPYRIGHT, 1920, BY ALFRED A. KNOPF, INC.

This book has been published and copyrighted in England under the title "Against the Grain" то ТОВУ



The June evening was light, a soft greyness that would last through the long hours till day returned. Beyond the white bed was the stretch of dark floor and a loom of objects that he knew rather than saw. He was not thinking of anything in the room but of something beyond the closed door, and it seemed to him that he could see the oblong of the door very clearly and that its stiffness and stillness meant for him safety.

In that room, behind that shut, latched door, he was safe — quite, quite safe.

He sighed, for it was nice being safe, nice and yet . . . He liked being safe, yet he wanted to be in danger. He wanted to feel queer and creepy and afraid, to dare the thing that was lurking in the dark outside the door.

He knew what to do. You ran to the door, you flung it open, and then a wild rush and you were back in bed. When you had got over your terror you sat up again and called "Bogey!"

You called "Bogey!" three times.

You called, sitting up and with the door open, with nothing between you and it; and then you waited — you waited . . .

Till it came.

You were not really brave unless you could do this.

Harry had tried before, but he had failed. Sometimes he had fallen asleep while thinking about it; sometimes,

when he had just made up his mind to take the risk, James had come to bed, and then, of course, it was no good. A boy must be all by himself when he called "Bogey!"

Tonight James was away. He was staying with grandmother at her farm. And Richard would not come to bed until the clock on the stairs struck eight. Harry

had an hour to himself, a whole hour.

He wondered over "Bogey." Something black and ugly and bad. All bones, perhaps, bones that would rattle, and chains — yes, chains! The boy next door said Bogey was a ghost with a light inside his head and blood on him.

And when he came slipping round the edge of the doorway, creeping gradually in, the black, horrible Bogey, what would he do?

What would he do to the boy, the little boy, who had let him in, who had called him?

Would he spring suddenly . . . ?

Harry was damp with fear, but he slipped one leg out of bed and then the other. The journey across the floor was all too quickly accomplished. He had his hand on the door.

Another moment and he was scampering back, was safe in bed with his dark head under the clothes. It was some time before he emerged, before he sent a questioning glance about the room. Bogey might have come. But no, the place was as before, grey with the summer night and very still. It was certainly shadowy but the shadows did not move. Harry assured himself of this. He stared fixedly at each corner in turn, and his heart gradually left off beating so quickly, for nothing moved, not even the blind or the cover of the dressing-table—nothing.

The moment was coming, the terrible moment when he must call.

He would count one, two, three, and then -

He counted slowly, a pause between each word, and his noisy, childish voice was a mere thread of sound.

"Bogey!"

And again, "Bogey!"

And yet again.

His two hands held each other tightly and he sat very still. The least movement might draw attention to him; but if he, as it were sank into the night, became a part of the furniture, he might be unobserved. He held his breath, straining his hearing. He was ready, he was tensely expectant.

What was that?

He had caught a faint sound, but it was not from beyond the door, it was in the room itself. His nerves thrilled in earnest. At the bottom of his sceptical soul he had cherished a doubt of Bogey, but the doubt vanished before this little definite sound. His skin turned gooseflesh, he tried to pierce the shadowy greyness. He was so very large, sitting upright with hunched knees, so visible in his white nightshirt. He seemed to himself simply immense. Bogey could not possibly miss him.

He rallied his forces. He was afraid, but he must not mind his fear. Afraid or not, he must face what was coming. As he so resolved his fear seemed to grow less. He began to look about him, looked with sharp glances, and presently he had located the noise, the little stir of movement. Bogey was on the other side of the room, near the bed in which Richard slept.

He heard a light thud, and his heart bounded, then fell to quiet beating.

"Tommy!" he exclaimed, and then, reproachfully, "Oh, Tommy!"

The kitten had ensconced itself in a forbidden nest. It had hidden itself from the many children of the house — from baby's unconscionable affection, from Harry's dominance — had nestled down between the pillows of Richard's bed until only one spot of warm blackness could be seen from above. Harry, undressing and getting into bed, had not noticed it. His cry had roused it, had suggested that its downy hiding-place was discovered; and, unwilling, with the yawning of a pink-lined mouth, with stretching of fine claws, it had stepped out and jumped.

"Oh, Tommy, you naughty cat, you know you aren't lowed here!"

He had forgotten Bogey; the sinfulness of Tommy filled his six-year-old mind to the exclusion of all else. He had got out of bed, he had turned Tommy — soft, cuddly, pin-pricky Tommy — out of the room. He pushed him over the top stair, scolding him a little, telling him to go down, to go down quickly or mother would catch him.

Tommy was very naughty. He knew he oughtn't to come into the bedrooms. He deserved to be beaten.

Harry got back into bed thinking he should have beaten Tommy so that 'nother time he would have 'membered. But it was too late now. Tommy had run over that top stair and over all the others as far as Harry could see. He had gone down, down into the dark.

And suddenly he remembered Bogey, who was down there in the dark. Tommy had run down to him. He had not miau-ed; he had not minded a bit, not a bit.

Cats were very brave.

II

Jack Tremaine had come to spend the half-holiday with Harry, and they had spent it in the garden, of which Harry was proud because it consisted of a long piece at the back and an extra strip, a strip at the side. His father had bought the land and built the house. No other house in the road had more garden than the straight piece at the back. The Kings, however, had not only the straight piece of grass, with vegetable-beds and a chickenrun but, between that and No. 13 Parkside, a yard and a wild bit; and in the wild bit were trees and a summerhouse. Harry's father had built the summer-house and Harry had helped. On the roof Mr. King had set a dovecot, and the cooing inhabitants of it had always interested Harry.

"Let's play pirates," said Jack.

It being Harry's garden, he felt it was for him to say how they should spend their time. Besides — pirates! He disapproved of pirates.

"Let's be a man-of-war — like the Lord — and catch the pirates."

Jack was dubious. He had never heard of playing "Man-of-war." He didn't believe there was such a game. He tried to think why "Pirates" was fascinating and Harry, watching his freckled face with the snub nose and grey-green eyes, knew that he was trying, heavy fashion, to get his own way. Jack often tried but he was slow, he never managed it.

"Pirates," said Jack, "catch sailors and make them walk the plank."

Behind, the water-butt was a number of boards. To drag them out, balance them on bricks, make the prisoners walk them — yes, a point in favour of piracy.

"Battleships," said Harry, "catch the pirates, they always catch them. Then they hang them from the yard-arm."

Hanging from the yard-arm was not so thrilling — even if you saw them dangling in a row — as walking the plank. Harry threw in a further attraction. "Men on battle-ships wear uniform."

- "You haven't any."
- "Have, then."
- "Where?"
- "Never you mind."

The promise of uniform turned the scale. Jack would play battleships, even though there wasn't such a game, if playing it meant a warlike appearance. Under Harry's directions he dragged out the boards and improvised a deck.

"The look-out's up there," said Harry, with a blink at the dovecot. He had often wished to see where the birds laid their eggs and what baby-doves were like. The dovecot, though forbidden, was accessible, and who was to know?

"And I'm captain!"

Jack reflected, a little sourly, that Harry was always captain. It wasn't fair! However he, Jack, was growing quickly; he would soon be bigger than Harry and then they would see. He pushed the last plank into place and stood back to admire the resultant bristle. Difficult to walk on but a real wooden deck!

Harry, who had disappeared into the house on mysterious business, returned carrying a lumpy bundle. He had trotted from room to room annexing properties. The red silk curtain-ties in the drawing-room would make soldier-sashes; Richard's striped jersey, his father's scar-

let chest-protector, Mrs. King's Paisley shawl, his sister's hair-ribbons — he stuffed them into the bundle. Moreover, as guns and ammunition were imperative, he laid Bet's money-box under contribution. The sixpence was difficult to extract; it needed patience and a pair of scissors.

He had also to provision the ship. If only his mother would go up to her room for a little!

"I've had a hard morning's work," he heard her tell Mrs. Clarke of next door.

"Baking, I suppose?" said Mrs. Clarke.

"On my feet since six; but I never sit down till I'm done."

"It's the best plan."

He looked through the crack of the scullery door and saw her wiping her hands on the towel. That meant that she had finished washing-up. He slipped into the bootcupboard and waited till she came out — till, indeed, he heard the stairs creak under her tread.

In the larder were freshly baked rock-cakes.

Also apples and jam-tarts! Strawberry jam — oh, golly!

The boys turned themselves into a press-gang and collected the family pets. A ruffled tom-cat, a goat, the monkey from Jamaica, and two protesting hens were

brought on board to serve as crew.

Harry's duty to con the ship! From the dovecot he would obtain a wide sea-view, get an early glimpse of merchant prizes, of pirates, corsairs, and other interesting water-craft. All, indeed, might have gone well with that particular game if his roving glance had not lighted on a pot of green paint which had been left by his father on the bench by the kitchen door. To leave it sunning itself in peaceful inactivity, was impossible. Harry did

not know what he would do with it; nevertheless he provided for emergencies by carrying it with him into the dovecot.

For some time the pursuit of marauders kept him busy, but when the ammunition was expended and the provisions had disappeared he found himself at a loss. The pirates were dangling in a row, and Jack had gone home to tea. He looked about him for something on which to expend his still unexhausted energy and, looking, saw the pot of paint.

He glanced from the paint to the doves.

Grey was a dull colour. The poor birds couldn't help being grey; but they would, of course, rather be something else, something brighter.

Green was brighter.

During the afternoon Mrs. King had more than once sent a thoughtful glance down the garden. Harry was making "a rare old litter" but, for once, did not seem to be in mischief. She knew her larder had been raided, and for that would in good time see that he was punished; meanwhile she could think placidly of him as busy and within reach. After all, he had not taken many of the rock-cakes.

When he came in to tea she noticed specks of green on hands and clothes. That pot of paint ought not to have been left on the bench. Still, no harm seemed to have been done.

"Come here and wash your hands."

As he stood at the sink, scraping and scrubbing, he chattered of pirates — Algerine pirates. He had hanged all he could catch — all his sisters' dolls. They were hanging out there in a row, and he thought of their fluttering garments, their loose legs and arms. A most satisfactory afternoon.

His mother, unsuspicious of the pirates' identity, stood listening. For once he had not been up to mischief, he had been a good boy.

Suddenly, however, she bethought her of the raided larder.

He must learn he should not go behind her back and help himself; but he was getting big. No longer possible to lay him across her knee. Necessary, though, to keep the upper hand.

The boy, grubby paws in water, innocent face a-lather, was at her mercy. She struck him sharply across the cheek.

"What's that for?" he cried, but she had turned and was crossing the kitchen on her way to the tea-table. Hastily he wiped off the soap and followed. "What was that for?"

"Oh, you know!" She was already busy apportioning the slices of bread and dripping. He must know, and if he didn't, let him think it out.

Harry went to his place. This was not the first time that his mother, apparently for no reason whatever, had thus taken him unawares. Why? His conscience was clear. He had done nothing — a prick — well, nothing, at least, of which she knew!

His mother was undoubtedly a person to be avoided.

Not until the following day did the reason for those paint-specks on Harry's clothes and face come to light. The doves had not taken kindly to their coats of spring green. Harry, confronted with the dead birds, was sorry and said so — sorry, not that he had painted them but that they had been so foolish as to die. How could a boy guess that doves were so delicate?

"Henry, come upstairs with me."

"I don't want to come." He thought of the strap

that hung by the bed-head in his father's room. "And if you drag me up, I'll kick your shins, I will."

"Will you? We'll see about that."

Mr. King, laying on stripes with right goodwill, reflected that you never knew what Harry would be up to next.

Ш

"If you'd give me the money, mother, I'd buy the holly and mistletoe for you."

Three days before Christmas and no sign of evergreens.

Could it be his parents had forgotten?

"We can't afford it this year."

Why couldn't they? He had seen berried branches being carried into other houses. Why couldn't his people have them?

"James's illness," said his mother, lining patty-pans with pastry, "and then your father hasn't had the rise

that he expected, and there's such a lot of you."

James had been ill a long time. He had stayed home from school and had lain in bed. Harry hadn't seen him for weeks and weeks. Did staying in bed cost money? Of course, there were a lot of them — Richard, James, Himself, Bet, Nancy, and little Mab; but what had that to do with decorating the house for Christmas?

"You want such a lot of boots and shoes," volunteered his mother as she put a dab of mincemeat in the middle of each patty-pan. The dark speckled lumps were very small. Harry watched her with a feeling that something was wrong. A mince-pie should be large, and full of mincement!

His mother cut rounds of pastry and fitted them over the dark lumps. "Such a lot of boots and shoes," she sighed, "and everything costs money."

RI

But you didn't decorate the house with boots and shoes, and as to the evergreens, why should they cost money?

Harry would find some. Findings were keepings, and he fancied that he knew where to look.

Holly, of course, grew on bushes and could be picked, but he was not sure about mistletoe. He had never seen it growing. Still, it was just a plant, it must grow somewhere! He set out for the residential part of the town, and, looking over garden-walls, saw many bushes and trees of holly, but not one — not so much as a single plant — of mistletoe. Should he make do with what offered or should he go further afield? . . .

While he debated a greengrocer's cart came up the road. It paused before the side-door of a substantial house and, while the man was delivering his goods, Harry lightened it of a fine bunch of Christmas greens.

How pleased his parents would be! They would be able to decorate the house, make it like all the other houses in the road. They could put holly-sprigs over the pictures and hang mistletoe from the coloured globe in the hall. There would be holly, too, for the pudding, a nice berried bit.

"Where did you get that holly?" His father's voice did not sound pleased. Could anything have happened to put him out?

"Oh, I don't know; I just got it."

"Where, Henry?" said Mrs. King.

"Down the road." Harry hoped his reply suggested hedges of holly in a country lane, hedges that were free to any boy.

"Was it given to you?"

As if any one would give you a big bunch of Christmas greens! "I thought you'd be glad of it."

"Was it come by honestly?"

What a fuss about nothing! If he had realized that they were so particular he would have broken up the bunch, made a disorderly bundle of it, and said he had gone into the fields and picked it.

"You young limb," said his father, "where did you

get it?"

Harry, taken by surprise, told the truth. Old Short, the greengrocer, had lots of holly, lots and lots; he would not miss one small bunch.

"It is not that!" Mr. King explained that they would rather have gone without Christmas decorations than that Harry should have taken the evergreens. "It's stealing," he said; but Harry thought that if he could have persuaded them he had picked the holly in the fields, they would have put it on the walls and been glad of it. It was only stealing because he had been found out.

After tea he was made to carry the bunch to Mr. Short's shop, confess what he had done, and hand it over. His father said that would be good for him.

"I can't see," said Harry, "why other people should

have holly and mistletoe at Christmas if we can't."

"We can't have everything we want," said the father. They were passing an old red manor-house set back among the trees, and he pointed to it. "For instance, we can't all expect to live in a house like that."

"Why not?" The wild bright eyes, slightly aslant in the broad face, looked from the house with its sweeps of lawn, its proud outlook over the surrounding country,

to the man at his side.

"It stands to reason," said Mr. King.

"The men in the big houses get what they want and the others don't?"

"Nobody gets what he wants." A man wanted things

for himself — love, gratified ambition; instead he got children and had to work for them, to work all day and overtime. "We all learn, at last, to do without."

Doing without, thought Harry, was poor fun. He did not intend to try it — not more, that is, than he could help. Parents made you go without, but when you were grown up you could do as you pleased. When he had a house of his own he would decorate every room with holly and mistletoe and he would not pay for a single sprig, not one.

Mr. Short's shop was on Main Street, and many an apple had Harry prigged when the greengrocer was measuring out paraffin at the back. Mr. King led the way in, and the culprit, clutching the evergreens in chilblainy hands, followed. He did not like crossing the threshold. If his father had not been there he would have thrown the bundle in at the door and run away. What would Mr. Short do to him?

A barrel of apples just inside the door, farther on a crate of oranges; so easy to pocket one or two.

But he mustn't.

Mr. Short tossed the bunch of evergreens — his, Harry's bunch, the bunch that was to have made festive his home — on to a pile at the back of the shop. "If boys always had to give back what they helped themselves to," he said, "my place 'ud be pretty full," but he thanked Mr. King and said that was the way to bring boys up and no mistake.

Harry was leaning against a crate of oranges. If they went on talking he knew that he would help himself. He didn't want to, but the crate was open and his fingers were sliding over the rough roundness of the fruit.

His father wouldn't like him to take the oranges, He

had disapproved so greatly of his taking the holly. It had seemed to hurt him that Harry should have taken that holly.

He must be more careful.

You didn't learn to do without, you helped yourself to what you wanted, but you did it carefully, very, very carefully.

When Richard came up to bed that night he paused just inside the door and sniffed. "Oranges!" said he. "Who's got oranges?"

"There's one for you." Harry sat up in bed. "Here

you are - catch!"

Though Richard accepted the fruit he was suspicious. "Where did you get them?"

Harry had his explanation pat. "Boy at school," said he.

ARRY, trying to look as if wholly occupied with his dinner, was listening to the conversation of his elders. He had signalized his first day at the new school—the school that was for boys only—by a fight, and Richard was telling about it. He wanted to hear what Richard would say.

Before him, on a grey-blue landscape plate, was a helping of meat and potatoes. Presently he would nudge his mother and ask for more. He was such a hungry boy.

"When I came into the room," said Richard, "Henry was sitting on the bench; but his face had that look, that sort of set look — you know —"

Mr. King nodded. He knew.

"The big boys were telling Two Puddings he mustn't

put up with cheek from a kid."

"Two Puddings, as you call him, is bigger than Henry?" The little feeling of elation in that one of the brood had proved stronger than another man's son was wrong. The old Adam again. He must wrestle with it, put it down.

"Oh yes, he's the same age as James."

The family looked at James, who was two years older and half a head taller than Harry. "Bigger'n me," said James.

"After a bit, old Two Puddings came on, swinging his arms and, when he came close, Henry jumped up and hit him. He hit him on the chin and Two Puddings

went down. The boys were awfully surprised and they burst out laughing. He couldn't stand that, so he got up and came for Henry again, and again Henry knocked him down."

Mr. King looked along the table — three boys one side, three girls on the other, his children; and his glance came to rest on Harry. Richard was handsome and clever; James was all right. But Harry? He wasn't clever — at least, not at his books — and he certainly wasn't handsome. The face was too heavily boned, the well-cut mouth too wide, but there was a something about the boy, some quality. Harry was — that was it — he was alive!

"What was the fight about, Henry?"

Harry put the last bit of potato into his mouth and glanced at the big vegetable-dish. "He said my mother made my breeches."

The father could not see more than an inch or two of the garments in question, but the pattern seemed familiar. "Well, didn't she?"

Harry's straight brows came into a point over narrowed evelids. "I won't have any one say so."

The breeches, cut from a pair of Mr. King's trousers, were a sore point. Other boys had suits, suits bought at a shop. Two Puddings had one of corduroy velvet—real corduroy velvet. His mother, when he asked if he could not have one like it, had said it was out of the question—that Two Puddings' father, Mr. Chapman, was rich, had the biggest draper's shop in the town.

Harry wondered why his father wasn't rich. Was it because he sat in an office all day instead of selling things in a shop? You got lots of money selling things, you were getting money all the time. Besides that, there were the things in the shop. If you wanted them, you

could take them. In Two Puddings' Shop there was a window full of suits. No doubt they had gone to it and just taken out the real velvet corduroy. How Harry wished that his father had a shop!

"I'm afraid," said Mr. King, clearing his throat, "I'm afraid, Henry, that you've made a bad beginning at your

new school."

The look of ingenuous surprise that flitted over the child's face showed him this was an occasion which it was his duty to improve. Heathens, these boys; and that in spite of all you did or said.

"You don't suppose, do you, that fighting is the way

to get on?"

Harry's eyes grew round. The whole school was talking of the fight!

"Fighting gets you into the master's bad books and will make you unpopular among the boys."

"It is unchristian," contributed Mrs. King.

"Makes you feel good," ventured Harry, looking at his father. When Two Puddings had called him a "mammy's boy" and asked who made his breeches, he had felt very hot and angry. He had hated Two Puddings; he had hit him as hard as he could, hit him twice and knocked him down. Then he, Harry, felt all right. Two Puddings wasn't a bad chap - no, in spite of the cordurov suit, he wasn't.

"You mean," said Mr. King, "that because you have won you feel pleased with yourself?"

"No," said Harry. That wasn't it. You were pleased of course, pleased to have won, but also - well, you felt good.

"That, my lad," pursued Mr. King, "is just what is wrong with fighting. A boy should make his way in the world by hard work and sticking to his books, not by hurting people and getting the better of them and glorying in it."

He glanced at his other sons, and Harry knew that he was being compared, unfavourably, with those meritorious ones. In the home circle they were the shining lights, he the person who got all the kicks. But he didn't do things in order to be bad; in fact, he meant to be good. He was good inside, it was only that things happened. Wherever he was they happened, and people blamed him. Really, it wasn't fair.

II

Mr. King, just home from the office, was bending over a hen-coup at the end of the garden. He had lifted a spadeful of manure, picked out the worms and brought them to the eager chickens. The mother-bird clucked, and the grey chicks picked up the worms and ran with them about the enclosed space that was their world. Stimulating food — worms! The chicks would grow all the bigger for that spadeful. He must remember to give them one daily.

A crunch of feet on the cinder-path made him look up. A little compact figure, erect as an oak yet flowing in movement that was unusually swift, was coming towards him. He watched it with an indulgent eye. A young turk, if ever there was one!

"Well, Henry, what's up with you?"

Evident from the brightness of Harry's eyes that something of an exciting nature had occurred. The boy plunged into his tale. Two Puddings — Chapman — had been late for school, but when he came —

"Oh, father, he was on a velocipede, and it was his own. It had a big wheel in front and a little one at the

back, and he can ride it. He let me try, and I want — oh, I want one, father."

"You must think I'm made of money."

The brown hen, espying a worm which, overlooked, was giving signs of life, called to her little greedies. The eager running of the tiny feet pleased Mr. King, and he smiled.

Harry, watching the bearded face, took the smile for a sign of yielding. He broke into entreaties. If his father would only give him a velocipede—

Mr. King wished that he could. The worst of narrow means was that you must deny, not only the children, but yourself. Nothing would have given him greater pleasure than to gratify their legitimate desires. Better for them, of course, that he could not; but he wished that sometimes, just once in a way—

Harry wanted that velocipede so badly. Coming third in the family, the poor little chap did not get much. Cast-off clothes, old school-books, the leavings of the others. It was hardly fair.

"I'll see," he said at last, and Harry could hardly believe that he had heard aright.

III

"What's up?"

"My tricycle has come."

"What?"

"It's in a crate, and the crate is so big it won't go into the yard."

Richard put his books aside and came. Harry was a lucky dog. If he, Richard, had known that velocipedes were going he would have put in for one. Even a secondhand article, which was a tricycle at that, was better

[&]quot;Richard, mother wants you to help her."

than nothing. He felt an elder brotherly interest in the crate. What was Harry's was also, in a sense, his.

He found his mother helping a carman to manœuvre the crate into the drying-yard. The big wooden case seemed to have particularly hard and sharp corners; it was also weighty.

"Quarter of a ton, I says," remarked the carman.

Released from its wrappings, the new acquisition justified him by a certain cumbrousness. The tyres were solid, the chains and ironwork of a clumsy make. The tricycle had been built for an invalid gentleman who, having gone the way of wings, no longer needed it. On its being offered for sale second hand, Mr. King, by now repenting a weak moment, had seen his chance.

"It will do for Henry to practise on," he said.

IV

"There's Uncle Bob," said Harry, "I could go and see him."

"Shoo!" said Mrs. King, "of course you can't." Uncle Bob lived at Bristol, and Bristol was forty-five miles by road, too big a journey for a boy of ten. She had seen Chapman on his velocipede, had heard it said that he rode round and about, did as much as six miles in a day. A good boy that, one who would never cause his parents anxiety. She glanced at her wild, dark son. Forty-five miles!

"Well," said Mr. King, "I don't know . . . "

She threw up her hands. "If you're going to egg him on . . ."

"I'm not egging him on." He didn't want the boy turned into a mollycoddle because his mother was afraid! "But Bristol would be only a day's journey on this," he tapped the tricycle, "and if he knows a boy who would go with him . . ."

The elders of the family had gathered to see Harry oil the machine. He had already bestowed more of the lubricant on his person than on the tricycle; and more on both, Mrs. King thought, than could have been in the little oilcan. He looked up, drawing a hand across his brow and leaving behind a glistening smear. "Jack would go."

"His mother wouldn't let him."

But Harry knew better. "His mother lets him do things."

V

"Five shillings, Henry, will be enough to take you there and back. Put down on this piece of paper what you spend and don't let it be more than you can help."

Mr. King, a little uneasy lest, after all, harm might befall his Benjamin, walked with Harry to the door. In the road Jack Tremaine was standing by a new machine. He looked, with his honest freckled face and straight glance, as staunch a comrade as any father could wish his son. Mr. King glanced at the sky. "July weather," he said, "you ought to have a pleasant run. Now, don't forget — a ship-chandler's shop on the quay, name of Hall. Well, give my love to your uncle."

Harry sat his four hundredweight of clumsy contrivance as if it had been a high-mettled steed. His heart was full. This was not a game, he and Jack were not making believe; they were actually starting off by themselves to see the world.

He had thought he would never, never get the tricvcle. His father had told him that the Organization was looking for it. A queer thing, the Organization. You never saw it, yet it brought eggs and butter and hams from farms

up and down the line and it put them in your larder. His father had told him that every railway-station was at a town and the Organization looked in the shops of those towns for what you wanted. The Organization lived, he thought, in the railway-stations; it must live somewhere.

It didn't buy things for everybody, only for people like his father, who worked for the railway. His father had said it was a wonderful thing, that it made the money go twice as far. His mother said that might be; but, for her part, she liked to see things before she bought them.

The Organization had been a long time looking for the tricycle. It was really, of course, looking for a velocipede, and Harry was sorry that no second-hand boy's velocipedes were to be found. However, he was lucky to get anything. Richard, who was going to Cheeley Grammar School next term, would have given his eyes for it; Harry knew by the way his brother had examined it, that he would.

"I say, Bear!"— Bear was Harry's nickname —"I felt a spot of rain."

A drop had splashed on Harry's face. He looked at the hurrying clouds. "I don't expect it will be much."

"Mother said she didn't believe we should have it fine."

"Why not?"

"Something about July rains."

"Do you want to go back?"

He scouted the idea. "Rather not."

The boys buttoned up their coats, slanted their heads to meet the drive of the rain and pedalled on. Rain or shine, they would get to Bristol before they turned.

Before long, however, the water was squishing out of the seats of their knickers. Harry knew by experience that the rub of wet cloth cuts the skin, and at Chippenham they compromised with fate by seeking refuge in a little tayern.

A motherly woman, after stripping them by her kitchen fire, sent them flying naked overstairs. In the downy depths of a four-poster they slept till skies had brightened and their clothes were dry. When the reckoning came, Harry discovered that his five shillings had not been calculated on a basis of tavern meals and beds.

The weather on the following day alternated between wet and fine. As the boys were obliged to spend a good deal of time sheltering from showers, their journey was protracted beyond what careful parents had thought possible. On the evening of the second day they stopped outside the windows of a cookshop to discuss how Harry's last shilling could be spent to the best advantage. The choice lay between hot boiled ham and a meat-pie. Harry's stomach craved the former. Having been on short commons all day, he was fiercely hungry. Clutching the coin in a small hard hand, he sniffed the appetizing smell.

"Crikey! I feel as if I could eat the shop! Come on in."

As he spoke a stout woman jogged his elbow with her market-basket and the shilling was jerked out of his hand. The boys were standing on a cellar-grating, and the coin fell between the bars and disappeared.

A cry of dismay broke from Harry's lips. "My shill-

ing, Jack!" and he rushed into the shop.

The proprietor was a big fat man who filled all the space behind the counter. He looked at the boys with little eyes that seemed to be playing at hide-and-seek between rolls of pale fat. To their story he listened with a smile. Fine story, that! He hoped they didn't expect

him to believe it? Let them into his cellar to look for what wasn't there? He knew a trick worth two of that. If they wanted to buy anything he'd be pleased to wait on them; if not, let them clear out of that and pretty quick too, or he would send for a policeman.

Outside the town Harry, who had been silent for some time, called a halt. "You stay here with the machines," he said. "I shan't be long."

"What are you up to, Bear?"

"I'm going back for my shilling."

"Let me come, too."

"No, you stay here."

An hour later he returned carrying a large pork pie.

"How did you get that, Bear?"

"Oh, I just took it."

The boys ate till they were satisfied. "You wouldn't believe," said Harry, "how much that man is disliked. While I was there some one threw a stone and smashed his window. I should think it would take more than a shilling to mend it."

They got to Bristol late that night, and found that Uncle Bob, having heard from Mr. King that they were on their way, was grown anxious as to what had delayed them. The boys were very dirty, very tired — too tired to do more than roll into the beds Mr. Hall's housekeeper had prepared.

When, a day or two later, they were ready to return, Harry asked for a road-map. He wanted to plan a different route.

"Why not go back the way you came?"

"No fun in that, Uncle Bob. You see, we know the people on that road."

"All the better for you."

But Harry was not sure that he agreed with Uncle Bob.

THINK, Mr. King, that your son is doing no good to himself or other people here. He should go to boarding-school."

The father thought of an attic room which he never failed to visit before going to bed. Under the slope of the roof were iron beds with blue-and-white quilts, and on the pillows had lain three dark heads. Richard and James were gone, now it was Harry's turn. The school that swallowed them for the greater part of the year must take him also. Mr. King would not need to toil night after night up the attic stairs.

"Yes," he said, "to boarding-school."

"The others are doing well?" Mr. Lane was proud of his old scholars, now at Cheeley Grammar School. He had taught them since they were little chaps, and Richard's scholarship, James's high place in class, reflected glory on the day-school.

"Better than I could have hoped."

With their example, such a shining one, before Harry's eyes, with the "out-of bounds" to wall him from temptation, surely the wild strain would be, if not eliminated, at least brought under control. Yes, Harry must go, must have his chance; but without him, Lord, how quiet the house would be! "I'll send him to Cheeley."

"There's a lot of good in the boy." To Mr. Lang he was as a Pied Piper among the lads, leading them astray.
"If he could be made to work he'd do well — not as well

as Richard, perhaps, not even as well as James, but well

enough."

Made to work; that is, made to work at his books. Harry liked work of a sort, but not book-work. Was there no other road to success? Mr. King had a suspicion that there might be, and this glimmering persisted for a little; but no, he could not think of any other road. "When Henry settles down," he said heavily.

"He will settle down all right under Dr. Waugh."

"Well, thank you, Mr. Lane. I expect you have had

a good deal to put up with."

The schoolmaster pushed back his chair. "There have been compensations," he said, wondering for a moment whether original sin was not more endearing in a boy than scholarship.

II

"You'll do all right because you are good at games," said Richard; "that is, if you aren't cocky."

"How many boys are there at Cheeley?"

"About three hundred and sixty."

Harry, following his seniors into the school precincts, determined to be self-effacing. He would watch other boys, do just what they did. One of fifty new-comers, he fell back among them, feeling that the place was big and he very small. It was a little oppressive, Cheeley, and everything was strange. The town in which he had lived seemed to his backward glance a place of half-lights and pleasant familiarity. He knew every street and turning, almost every boy. But this old grammar school—bare, cold, ringing with unknown, perhaps hostile life—he was lost in it, unpleasantly alone.

Still, they had picked him to play in the House game. His name was at the bottom of a half-sheet of paper that was pinned up on the wall. A lot of other names, then —"King."

He had been playing with the kids and had shot three goals, and they had cheered him and Gaunt, a big chap, had said, "You may have the honour of walking to chapel with me."

Sweet the plaudits: "King! King! Go it, Bear!"

He was called "Bear" because of his black mop and because he was quick. Bears were like lightning and you never knew what they would do next. Also they boxed; they stood up on their hind legs and hit out like a man. He did not mind his nickname; he rather liked it.

Richard and James were pleased with him. They saw him walking into chapel with Gaunt, and Richard had said, "What's that young brother of mine been up to now?" If he hadn't been pleased he wouldn't have said "young brother."

Harry had made himself felt — a little; but he must be quiet about it, he mustn't tell anybody, mustn't let himself go.

Difficult that. There were such a lot of things he wanted to do. He felt sometimes as if he must attempt some of them, one — just one.

If he did it secretly, didn't tell a soul, not a single solitary soul?

Better try it than burst.

If he didn't try it, that is what he would do, burst.

III

Dr Waugh, having arranged his shaving apparatus on the shelf that stretched below the round toilet-mirror, turned to set his watch by the abbey clock.

His glance, crossing the leafage of intervening space, the roof of the junior school, the medley of headstones, found the spire and rested on it contentedly — his spire, the tapering lines by which he set the clock of his daily life, the lines that went up and up. The half-chick at the top was gleaming in the sun. A fine autumn day, and he in tune with it. What a thing it was to have before your window the pointing serenity, the conviction of those lines!

But -

What was it?

Against the grey-blue of the sky a sharply increased curve, a bulge, was visible, not far from the base. Hastily picking up long-distance spectacles, Dr. Waugh studied the altered line of the spire, and as he did so thoughts of architects — the best in England — of builders, craftsmen, steeplejacks, ran through his mind. If the spire were damaged, tottering to a fall, it must be restored. His beautiful spire — yes, whatever it cost!

The boss was moving, it was distinct from the abbey spire, it had life. The spire was in no danger, but —

The boss was a boy — one, he felt certain, of the three hundred and sixty whom trusting parents had placed in his care. The boy would fall, he would be killed.

Ghastly! One of his boys — he saw a little broken body —

The bulge was ascending, it was moving slowly but steadily. Yes, but a slip, a false step, and it would come slithering down. And the sides of the spire! they were so steep! Dr. Waugh dared not hope; yet boys did escape, did make good, and even when hurt, badly hurt, they recovered. Boys were wonderful, so recuperative. Still — such a fall; and below were flagstones. He must not —

He could only will that the boy should get to the top. A step and yet another step! What a blessing it was a

still morning, no wind! Yet another step! Must have a good head, that boy. Ah — what? No, he had done it. He was actually at the top of Cheeley Abbey spire.

The head master drew a long sighing breath of relief.

Well, and now the youngster would come down.

What was he about? Dr. Waugh leaned forward, peering. The boy was shinning up the pole of the weathercock! To think that at that altitude he dared! He was up, though, and hanging his cap on the half-chick. It dangled, rakishly atilt, the proof of his exploit!

On the shelf at Dr. Waugh's side, the water in the green porcelain jar was grown first tepid and then cold. The head master had forgotten it, and he continued to

forget.

Once before in the history of Cheeley a boy had attempted the abbey spire. The school got wind of it, and the lad, looking down on a concourse of masters and boys, lost his head. Though he fell, Dr. Waugh remembered that he had not been badly hurt.

His parents had taken him home, had not been encouraged to send him back, and Dr. Waugh, walking quickly through the graveyard, wondered why. A boy who climbed the spire of Cheeley Abbey must have parts; it might even be that his daring was rooted in heroic earth. Such a boy must, surely, trust in something outside himself—his luck, his star, the unknown God—to bring him through; must put all he had into some great hand, make his attempt in the conviction that this hand would bear him up. Such faith might take its possessor far.

Turning a corner Dr. Waugh found the small adventurer of whom he was in quest, lowering himself into safety; he waited, suddenly conscious of weariness, until the boy's feet should have touched the ground.

Harry was smiling to himself, smiling contentedly. They had said no one could climb the spire and he had done it; he had done it during his first term.

He was hungry now, he wanted his breakfast. Would he be late? He did not think so. He had allowed himself plenty of time. He would slip in to breakfast with the others; and he would whisper to Bakewell about the spire, and perhaps to Vincent. If they didn't believe him, he would tell them to look at the weathercock.

The news would spread all over the school. "King has climbed the spire!"

"Where is your cap?"

Harry was staring at the homely but awe-inspiring figure of the head master. If only a gulf could immediately be fixed between his feet and those large house-shoes!

"Why did you climb the spire?"

His voice did not sound exactly angry.

"They told me I couldn't do it."

"It has been done before," said the voice, and Harry's countenance fell; he was to have been first, first and last! "The boy who did it was sent home."

Would the little fellow plead with him? No, not a word. The heavily boned face was set in unsmiling lines, the eyes clung to those vaguely patterned house-shoes.

"It has not been thought necessary to make a rule forbidding boys to climb the abbey spire, but you knew you were doing wrong."

No answer. Harry had a sensation as of the emptying of his little carcase.

"However, I have decided not to punish you." The blood began to flow back into the boy's face and he blinked, as a bird blinks to clear its vision. "Nevertheless, I am responsible for you to your parents, and you might have broken your neck." Dr. Waugh was fingering

in his pocket a broad silver-piece. "As I don't want the other boys to follow your example, I shall put you on your honour not to speak of this exploit."

"Yes, sir."

"I expect you will be punished for your carelessness in losing your cap."

"Yes, sir."

He brought out the coin. "You'll be late for breakfast. Cut along to the tuck-shop; the sausages there are pretty good."

The boy sped away and Waugh rose stiffly from the tombstone on which he had been sitting. "Can't remember when I've felt so tired," he murmured as he went along the paved walk that led to the schoolhouse. In his back was a twinge as of impending lumbago, and he put a hand to it, but not as if it held for him its old terrors. In the school workshops was a machine, the last thing according to Dr. Waugh, in beauty; and although Harry did not strike him as beautiful, his movements had brought the machine into the master's field of vision. The boy seemed made for the purpose to which he had set himself. Every part worked sweetly to the common end, and about him was no superfluous flesh nor any other sort of superfluity—not even, as Dr. Waugh remembered with a smile—not even any superfluous words.

He did not know the boy's name, but the compact figure, the bright eyes in a heavy face, the tousle of black hair, would not be difficult to remember; and his development ought to be interesting — among the three hundred and sixty, always one or two who were interesting to watch!

IV

Richard, walking with the Rugger captain, had paid a satisfactory visit to the tuck-shop.

"Let's stroll around for a bit." If he meant to get the Balliol Scholarship he ought not to spare the time, but he did not often get Chesterman to himself.

They walked past the sacred cricket-ground and along the end of the "footer" field. Richard stopped midway.

"What is it, King?"

"My young brother's playing. I wish you'd have a squint at him."

The great man drew up alongside. "Which?"

"The kid playing back this side."

They stood in silence for some minutes watching the game. Presently Chesterman laughed. "Little beggar kicks every way at once."

Richard nodded. "And he's no funk!"

"He'll do. His foot-work is jolly good for a youngster and he's heavy. I'll keep an eye on him."

"Thanks."

V

"The north wind doth blow," quoth Mr. Deacon, Harry's house-master. "I don't know —"

"The paper-chase is all arranged now, sir," urged a hare.

The head master's birthday, which was kept as a holiday, fell early in November, and for those boys — Harry was one of them — whose parents were too busy or too remote to visit their children, amusement was devised.

Mr. Deacon looked at the rout of brown and yellow leaves that was whirling past the door. "Well, Baker, keep in sight of the spire. If we have snow it isn't likely, at this time of the year, that it will be much."

"Very well, sir." The low-hanging woolly clouds might promise snow, but the wind was rising and would keep it off till they were back at Cheeley. Even if it didn't, what was a little snow? He wouldn't go far, but he had planned a puzzling run — the miry reaches of the river, the lanes about his home.

Anyway, you could see the spire for miles and miles.

The struggling pack was some time before it realized that the first white feathers, one here and one there, heralded a mighty plucking. Heated with running, it caught the occasional flakes and found their coolness grateful. By the time the lanes in which it was involved, debouched on a main road, however, the snowfall had curtained off what of the landscape was familiar. The boys found themselves in a dip of land, a sort of wide, shallow cup with the cloud-filled sky for cover and the snow for porcelain walls. Up these the road ran right and left without finger-posts, without even a landmark, to tell them which led to Cheeley.

One after another the boys, hurrying along, paused to look up and down the road. The hares, never once sighted, had led them hither; but already the light-blown paper of their scattering had disappeared under the snow. Even if they turned to the right, as the leaders suggested, that might not take them to Cheeley. The boys were only anxious to be safe housed against the weather. They decided to toss a coin. "Heads right, tails left! Tails it is."

VI

"Let's do that spider-web, Bear."

The web had been attached to a bramble-bush by a spider who knew the attraction blackberries have for every small winged creature. She had retired from business,

but the torn net still stretched across the reddening leaves. Harry was running with a little boy who had been sent to Cheeley for his health and who was the possessor of a black pocket-microscope, three lenses set in vulcanite and hung on one hinge. With this the boys had beguiled the tedium of the chase.

"The ground looks pretty slushy, Miller." Between the footpath and the bank on which, a gorgeous tangle of sprays, grew the bush, lay a piece of flat ground. This ground had once been a ditch, so broad that pond was the better name.

"Oh, it's firm enough," and the smaller boy set his foot on a tussock of wind-bitten grass. As he did so a mouse, which had been sheltering on the further side, ran out, making for the spiny cover. "Oh, look!" and Miller made after it. A step and the mire of the ditch was over his boot. He called to his companion, and Harry, springing forward, felt the caked surface shake and give. In another moment both boys were scrambling back to firm ground; but Miller, the more nervous of the two, had had a fright. His face had gone grey and he was shivering.

"I thought I was going to be sucked in."

"We'll stick to the path after this," said Harry. The water having run over the tops of his boots, his feet were wet, and he stamped them impatiently.

"It was a real bog. We might have sunk right down and only our caps been left to show what had happened."

Harry had no desire to minimize the danger. "They ought to put up a post as a warning. I've read in newspapers of people disappearing. I dare say some, ever so many, are at the bottom of that ditch. It's just as well," he added, looking down at his miry boots, "we didn't go in head-first."

Miller had recovered sufficiently to take an interest in

his surroundings. "Why, it's beginning to snow, and—and I can't see any of the others."

"They went this way," said Harry, pointing to some pieces of paper, and he quickened his pace.

When he and his companion reached the hollow which had the sky for patine and never a tree to make the snowy rim unequal, the rest of the hunt was out of sight on what it fondly hoped was the road to Cheeley. The boys paused to consider. To the left were the marks of feet, to the right bits of torn paper, over all the rush of thickly falling snow. They decided to follow the hares; but, before starting, Harry's glance rested thoughtfully on his companion.

"Look here, Milly, you'll get wet."

The smaller boy shrugged his shoulders and glanced afield over the quickly whitening landscape. "The snow isn't melting."

"It'll melt on you, silly."

"Can't be helped."

"You are going to have my coat." In those simpler times the boys had but two suits, one for daily wear and one for Sunday. They had no special running kit, and when Harry started that morning he had taken a great coat from the peg, not because he was cold but as a matter of habit.

"Shut up, Bear; I shan't do anything of the sort." His own coat had been left behind.

"You will, though."

"Not me." But for all his voice was confident, he had noted the square set of Harry's jaw. "I'm perfectly all right; besides, you'd catch cold."

"What, me?" His spirit flung the suggestion scornfully aside. "I'm awfully strong. Why, when the others had mumps I didn't. I can't catch anything, not even if

I try." He pulled off the thick coat which until that moment had been a handicap.

"Why should I have your coat?"

"Here, put it on." The other was succumbing, not to temptation, but the stronger will, succumbing thankfully. His eyes turned from the snowy waste, silent, lonely, threatening, to the steadfast countenance of his companion. He was not lost for he had Bear. He slipped his chilled arms into the coat.

To Harry, fastening the flap under the other's chin with a sense of glad surrender, came that uplift of the spirit which is ecstasy. To help what was weaker than himself; what, because of that weakness, must depend on him, always thrilled him to endeavour. Their plight, lost in the rapidly deepening snow — for these scurries out of the north meant a heavy fall in a short time — held no terrors for him. He had faith in a something outside himself, something which would bring them into safety.

"Come on!" he cried, and, with no longer any protection from the blast, stepped cheerily forward.

The boys bent their heads to the driving flakes and trudged for some time in silence. By deciding to follow the hares they had turned their backs on Cheeley and were traveling north. In the blinding scurry they failed to notice that the paper trail had vanished through a break in the whitening hedge; they had, in fact, forgotten the hunt and were mainly occupied with the effort to push through the growing drifts and, at the same time, keep on the look-out for a landmark.

"I say, Bear," cried Miller at last, his foot sinking through a drift of snow into what in summer days had been a hollow by a roadside bank. "Let's sit here for a hit."

[&]quot;We haven't time."

"It isn't late."

"Anyway, it's getting dark."

Miller yielded and began to walk on. "We don't seem to be getting anywhere," he said unhappily.

"Give us a chance."

The other boy sighed. "What a long road this is."

"You tired?"

"We seem to have been walking for hours."

"The hares," said Harry, who always knew where to lay the blame, "must have lost themselves. They ought to get a hiding for this. They would," he added, his anger running through him like a cordial, "if my father knew about it."

"If only there was a house."

The hurrying flakes were a grey wall between the little fellows and the countryside; to right and left of them the hedges ran on with only an occasional gate, and that leading not to a house but the inhospitable fields.

"I'm done, Bear. I can't go any farther."

"We must be near some place." He pulled the other to his feet. "I'll help you."

"Let's go back."

"Not much." He put an arm, already unusually thick, round Miller, urging him forward, and the boy, subdued to the stronger will, made a stumbling effort; but his lips were blue, his strength nearly at an end.

"I can't go any farther."

"You can. Come on now."

"I - I won't."

Harry's face was set. "You've got to."

" No."

"See here, Milly. I'll hit you."

"You'll hit me?" He quavered the words in feeble astonishment.

" Ay."

Miller's head had been swaying on his shoulders. He was sleepy with exhaustion, but this roused him. He stared into Harry's steadfast eyes for a moment, then began to flounder along the road. Harry would hit him. Harry had been kind but now he was cruel; and he meant it, meant to hurt. They went on again, and about them the dusk deepened, and still the flakes drove softly through the grey air. Suddenly Miller fell in a heap.

"Get up."

"Don't care," he muttered drowsily. Sleep was his utmost need; but Harry's fierce heart knew no hesitation. He fell on his companion with the flails of his frozen hands; he beat him back to consciousness. His anger warmed the other boy to a tearful effort, warmed himself too, and again they went staggering along the road.

VII

Samuel Baker, owner of Windyknowe Farm, was on his way home from Cheeley. In sufficient awe of the head master not to go contrary to his expressed wishes, the farmer, in spite of weather and inclination, had driven his son — one of the hares — back to the school. Now, with cap low over his eyes and collar up, he was using a lifetime's knowledge of the road to avoid sinking axle-deep into the drifts. So intent was he that, although for a time he was conscious of something small and snowy on the waste ahead, he had not brought his mind to bear on it. A hundred yards from Windyknowe the road turned sharply, and the farmer, occupied with his horse, nearly drove over a heap, which the gig lamps revealed as endowed with some sort of struggling life.

"Hullo," he shouted, pulling up, and, as the horse

stopped, the heat differentiated itself into two boys, one lying supine, the other aiming at him, in half-dazed mechanical fashion, blows which, though feeble, were still resolute. Neither child took any notice of the farmer; they were, indeed, reduced to the expression of a need—the need in the one for rest, and in the other to save.

"Hi, there, what are you doing?" and he jumped a little awkwardly, for he too was cold, out of the gig. His voice, followed by his presence, reached Harry, the less far gone of the children. He stood up, staring stupidly.

"He mustn't go to sleep."

Baker had a flask in his pocket.

He set to work on the sleeper. "And now," said he, lifting Miller into the gig, "you get in too. We'll be home in a jiffy."

Harry tried to obey, but his feet, long numb, had grown suddenly leaden; he could not lift them.

"You're pretty near done, old man. Here, give us your hand. There, that's it." He tucked the waterproof rug round the boy and started his horse. "It was lucky for the little chap," said he, and his voice deepened into a sort of thanksgiving, "very lucky indeed, that he had you with him."

RS. BAKER, fearing lest her husband might be asleep, came quietly into the parlour. The room was lighted by a log-fire, and Sam, in sprawling comfort, was stretched before it. His wife, tiptocing round the walnut-wood table, saw a pipe in his mouth, and smiled her relief.

"Well, Sally, put your new babies to bed?"

"I've put them in John's room."

"I lay they'll sleep tonight."

"The little one is asleep now and — well — so is the other."

He marked her hesitation. "What's wrong?"

"Don't like the look of him, Sam."

"Not like the look of him?" In his surprise he left his mouth wide. "Why, if it hadn't been for him t'other little chap would have been a goner. I was sitting here thinking of him, the one down and done for and the other nearly as bad but hammering away for dear life — it was for dear life, too."

"I don't mean that way; but he isn't sleeping as quiet as I should like."

"He'll be all right in the morning."

"I wish you'd take a look at him."

Sam heaved himself out of the armchair with a grunt and followed her upstairs. In the chamber hitherto sacred to the son of the house were a couple of small beds, one for John, the other for any boy he might bring home,

48

and in these the chance visitors had been put. In that nearest the door little Miller lay in the deep sleep of exhaustion. He was so still the coverlet was hardly lifted by his breath, but in his cheek was the faint rose of returning strength.

"That one will be all right," said Baker as they passed.

"Tougher than he looks."

Mrs. Baker's glance slipped quickly from this bed to the next. "Oh, yes," she said absently, "but —"

The farmer, accustomed to judge an animal's health by its appearance, turned on Harry a sharp, appraising glance. The boy, stretched on his back, was muttering in his sleep. His skin was dry, his face flushed, and he was moving his curly black poll from side to side as if he found it impossible to remain still.

Same repeated his verdict, but not as if he meant it to carry conviction. "He'll be all right by the morning."

"They were out for hours in that snow, the precious lambs," said Mrs. Baker, "and this one hadn't a great-coat."

"He's taken a chill."

"I hope it's nothing worse."

"Well, you can't do anything more for him tonight." She drew aside the blind and looked out. Snow was still falling; big flakes sailed out of the blackness and fell on the heaped window-sill. "I suppose not."

"I expect there's a precious to-do over the boys at Cheeley, but there's no way of letting the school know.

I'll drive in early tomorrow."

"Do," she said, and continued to stare into the murk.

"What is it, mother?"

"It might have been John," and as she spoke, Harry cried in his sleep as if in pain. "I think," she said softly, "I'll just lie down on the sofa here for tonight."

"You'll knock yourself up."

"I should feel happier, somehow, if I stayed with him." He pulled her ear, a sign with him of tenderness, and

went off, thinking it was a pity that, being Bakers, they had not the dozen that should have gone with the name. What was one child? It left the mother-heart too soft.

Before dawn Harry woke, complaining of aches in his joints, thirst and general discomfort. After giving him to drink, Mrs. Baker roused her husband.

"The wind has dropped and the snow is melting fast."

"It's early yet."

"I want you to drive to Cheeley and bring back Dr. Hargreaves."

"Is the lad worse?"

"He's feverish and he's in pain."

Harry, in the initial stages of rheumatic fever, had only a dim understanding of events. At first the faces that came and went were strange, but it seemed to him that they grew gradually more and more familiar, until at last his father and mother stood beside his bed.

He had been in pain, but some doctor-draught had deadened it for the nonce and he was fallen into an uneasy sleep. His opening eyes rested on his father's handsome face, full now of pity and anxiety. It puzzled Harry, who had never before seen his father moved.

"What is the matter?" he said feebly, and, looking for the reason, encountered his mother's glance. She, too, was in some way different. As far as her children were concerned she had hitherto swept through life on a gale of confidence; now she seemed troubled.

"Five others," she was saying, "no, I can't do it."

"He must come home," said Mr. King.

"I'm only one woman. I can't do everything."

"Well, but . . ."

"He must go to the hospital."

Plainly she suffered some reluctance, but not enough to affect her resolution. "They will look after him there better than I could." And, she said again, "Five others—no, I can't do it."

His father looked at her as if she were beyond his understanding. "You are willing that the boy should go?"

"I can't help it," she said.

"You don't like nursing," he said, and Harry heard in his father's voice a note that was familiar.

His mother turned away. "I'm no good at it," she said.

II

He did not see his parents again for some time - was, indeed, too much occupied with himself to care who nursed him. Wrapped in blankets, he was transferred from the farm to a hospital ward, and the travelling thither proved so agonizing that many years passed before he was able to look back on the journey without a wince for pain not yet forgotten. At intervals he became conscious of his father's face, of a voice in his ear that whispered encouragement; but his mind was mainly occupied with the thought that if the pain did not get better he must scream, and he did not want to scream. Later, he asked the nurses if he had cried out, and was amazed to find they did not know. A thing of so much importance and they did not know! When he put the question he had reddened with fear, had hung on the edge of shame, and they - they had not remembered!

"You must know."

"I'm afraid I didn't notice."

Harry couldn't believe it. "You didn't notice?"

"You were so ill, Harry."

But that to him was only a circumstance. "If I had called out," he said hopefully, "you would have remembered," and his face brightened. From thenceforward he might believe that he had not sinned against his canons.

During his long illness, his long convalescence, Mr. King, busy as he was, made opportunities to visit his son. Under an indifferent surface his heart hungered for a sight of the lad, now gaunt and feeble, who lay so quietly on his bed in the county hospital. The mother did not find she could spare the time, and the boy, not having been taught to look to her for tenderness, did not mark her absence. Hard mothers breed fierce sons, and Harry asked no more affection than he got.

"Hot stuff," said Dr. Hargreaves, and regretted that the lad would not emerge from the fiery ordeal unscathed.

"You say his heart is enlarged," said Mr. King. "What does that mean?"

"He'll have to be careful for a bit."

"But will it get all right?"

"Compensation will be set up."

"Will he be able to play games?"

"I expect so."

"He'd miss them."

"His physical development is quite remarkable. I've never seen such limbs."

The father's heart warmed towards this understanding man. "And when he leaves the hospital?"

"I should send him to the seaside."

Mr. King had never heard of sending people to the coast in winter. "I've a brother-in-law at Bristol."

"The boy would be looked after?"

"Hall is a bachelor, but his housekeeper is a good sort, and Harry was there last year."

"I dare say it will be all right," and the doctor reflected

that from such a rough-and tumble emerged the hardy Englishman, the pioneer. In Harry's case it would be sink or swim.

Ш

Christmas was still in the offing when Harry, with a handbag he was too weak to carry, arrived at the ship-chandler's shop kept by Robert Hall. His uncle, bearing in mind the adventure of the tricycle, suffered a shock when the boy, almost too tired to keep on his feet, stumbled across the threshold. "Lad's in a decline," he thought, unable to believe rheumatic fever responsible for the change; and his chief feeling was irritation. The young-ster had been promising, had been likely to do his stock credit, but this whey-faced, shambling scarecrow! Mr. Hall sent the boy to his housekeeper and thought no more of him.

Over the dark, queer-smelling shop with its well-salted customers was a room with rounded windows that looked south-west, and in this room the boy spent the greater part of the next fortnight. Every afternoon the place was flooded with sunshine, and Harry, basking in it, would lie on the window-seat and look through the many square panes on to the bustling quay. A forest of masts stretched from the grey stones to which the nearest boat was warped; and behind this leafless wood the sun set. Sometimes the forest was thick-set, close black lines against the glow; at others it swayed on the lifting waters; at others, again, it left gaps through which a path could be seen running west - a path which at close of day was liquid fire. This path it was to which Harry, when he was tired of watching the ships load and discharge cargo, turned his eyes. Boat after boat, cast off, gathered way and went down the golden road; and never vessel

left Bristol during those weeks but the boy's heart, the boy's questing spirit, went with her.

As he grew stronger his uncle, still taking him for granted, began to send him on errands; and these carried his eager feet on board ship and down into the inner parts, brought him in contact with men from abroad — men with gold ear-rings and parakeets and ditty-boxes, brown and black as well as white men. He lingered on the quays and by the docks; and insensibly, like Samson of old, he gathered strength. His sojourn in Bristol bred in the inland child a love of the sea, awoke in him that roving spirit which has peopled the earth. When a fresh term opened at Cheeley, Harry carried back a mind less than ever able to nourish itself with the sawdust of school-books — a mind which, like the spars of the outgoing vessels, the vessels that sailed into the sunset, was taken with glory.

IV

The February of that year being cold and dry, the school had good skating on the old fish-ponds. These survivals lay in a loop of the river about a mile from Cheeley, and Harry crossed the frozen land between as often as the authorities would permit. Figure-skating provided a vent for his unrest, and for a little he was able to forget the creaking of cordage, the cries and singing of the men at work, the many smells — brackish, foreign — which had made the Bristol quay a place of glamorous suggestion. When the cold snap showed signs of coming to an end and the ponds were declared out of bounds, the boy was in the full enjoyment of powers new to him. He was learning the Figure Three, and if he were to perfect it, must have practice over the turn. "A snidey thing" the thermometer, and when

no one was looking he shook it in the hope of causing the mercury to fall. Its continued rise even after this treatment was to him incomprehensible, a piece of spite.

The thaw came hesitatingly, to be held up by a wind from the north-east, a black wind and a bitter. If the water had been running in every dyke, the grass showing a young growth, Harry must have accepted the inevitable, but the land was still locked in frozen sleep. His form-master had spoken of a tragedy which was responsible for stringency on the part of the authorities; but Harry, listening, had been unmoved. He had once had his hand told by a gipsy, and she had promised him a long and adventurous career. While Mr. Cobb was describing the return of the disobedient Ellis - on a hurdle covered with a brown-and-vellow horse-cloth - Harry was saying to himself, "A long life and lots of changes! A long life and lots of changes!"

Two days previously the boys had been skating by moonlight, and Harry's thoughts returned persistently to his experience. He did his lessons ill because, between his eyes and the printed page rose the vision of a sheet of smooth grey ice, stretching from a belt of trees into the colourlessness of frost and flat fields and the wintry night. He did his lessons so ill that when morning school was over he found himself in the master's study waiting to be caned.

He had not hitherto been in this room, and, with the instinct of a little animal which may need at any moment a means of egress, he subjected it to a quick scrutiny. The brain dominating that stiff, compact body was full of half-formed plans. At any moment circumstance might make one or other of them possible, and for this he was ardently on the look-out. His roving glance,

passing lightly over furniture and bookshelves and less lightly over some African curios, came to rest on a French window which opened into a walled garden. He stepped up to it and studied such details as the height of the walls, the branches of adjacent trees which could be climbed, the lie of the rough ground beyond. The house faced the abbey, the garden sloping towards the river; and so small was Cheelev, such a mere wraith of its monkish self, that although the school was in the heart of the town, its grounds were bounded by rich pasture-The market square, with Corn and Hop Exchange, the lanes branching from it and full of decaying business premises, some fine houses wrapping their age in a cloak of ancient trees, were all that remained of the once famous cathedral town; and Harry, looking out of Mr. Deacon's window, saw only fields and river and a distant farm. The garden called to him, offering its solitude, its low walls, its position; and he wondered whether his housemaster used the study of an evening, and if so, at what time he went to bed. He knew nothing of the man's habits, but a young Mrs. Deacon existed stylishly in another part of the house, and it might be that he spent his evenings with her. The fireless grate made this appear likely, and when Mr. Deacon came hurriedly in, though Harry made the customary excuses, offered the customary pleas, accepted his fate with the customary air of submitting, because he must, to rank injustice, his mind continued busy with the garden-door and Mr. Deacon's habits. With regard to these latter, a cautious study of the young master's face helped him no whit. It was fair to redness, a nondescript in faces, the sort for which Harry, seeking quality, had no use. Contrasting it swiftly, contemptuously, with that of the head master,

he decided to give the plan now maturing itself in his brain "a go."

To keep awake was easy, and at twelve that night a shadow stole through the dimly lighted house. Harry, skates slung round his neck and boots in hand, pushed open the baize door which divided Mr. Deacon's life and house into two parts. The key had been turned in the study door, and as it was rolled back the wards clicked with an unoiled, metallic sound. During the afternoon Harry had discovered that the master's bedroom was over the study. He paused to listen, but no further sound broke the quiet. As wind drowns sound, the boy could have wished the night had not been so still. He stole cautiously across the study and, sitting on the mat before the door, put on his boots. Fear, not so much of discovery and punishment as of being prevented, made his ears feel as if they were growing. Unhasping the glass door and drawing it to behind him, he stepped lightly on to the frozen grass. The night was calling to him and the spirit in him that loved change and risk was answering on a jubilant note. He scudded across the lawn and in a twinkling was over the wall. His feet, crunching the rime, broke some thin plates of ice, and he heard the little crisp sounds with a sense of rapture. The light of the waning moon was bright enough for him to see his way, and, in an ecstasy of being, he sprang and danced as he ran joyously from field to field and along the road. He was free. He had left behind him the routine, the tameness, the subjection. For an hour or two he could be himself.

Arrived at the ponds, Harry found a long lane of smooth ice, snow-banks on either side, a low-lit whiteness and blackness that faded into grey mist. The loneliness was entirely to his taste, and for two hours he practised the Three, also the sweeping curves of Figure Eight, absorbed and happy, a little engine working full belt. As the moon declined, however, practical considerations began to intrude themselves, and he was presently trotting homeward. He was tired, but he had had his way, and if the frost lasted, might look forward to another night of freedom.

In this hope he vaulted the low wall of Mr. Deacon's garden and made for the house. Darkness was creeping over the earth, hiding the saliences, making the schoolbuildings something black and indistinguishable; but Harry's seeking hand fell lightly on the glass door. It yielded to his cautious push, and, stepping in, he fastened it securely, then sat down and began to unlace his boots. On the polished boards by the window the lace-tags fell with a tiny click which made his heart leap. He had put off freedom, he had left his courage with the night and was again a boy under authority, his one thought how to escape the punishment he had merited, how to pass from mat to carpet without a sound, how to climb the stairs without making them creak, how to slip past his schoolfellows' beds in the dormitory without being seen.

The boots were safely shed and Harry was stealing out of the study when the unforeseen happened. Mr. Deacon was plagued with unsound teeth, and, wakening to pain, had got up in search of a remedy. Where was the Bunter's Nervine? Only a brown stain on the shelf above the washstand showed the anguished man where it had stood. He remembered then that he had had it that afternoon in the study, and was on his way, candle in hand, to fetch it when Harry opened the door. For a moment master and boy faced each other in horrified

silence, Mr. Deacon forgetting that his teeth ached and Harry conscious of that sinking with which we greet force at once superior and menacing.

"What are you doing here?" Collecting himself, the

master led the boy back into the cold, dark room.

Harry, caught skates in hand, thought it best to give a truthful account of the expedition.

In Mr. Deacon's ear, however, the tale rang false. Ridiculous to suppose that a boy had broken out of the house in order to practise figure-skating; to practise it all by himself, too, on a distant pond.

"It was market-day," he said severely, as he reached

for his cane, "the monthly market."

Harry, a little puzzled, acquiesced.

"Why couldn't you say at once that you went to the booths and theatre?"

"I didn't, sir."

"You didn't?"

"No, sir."

"You went through the town."

" No, sir."

"You couldn't have got to the Old Ponds without going down the High Street."

"I went across the fields."

"You mean to tell me you went all that way round?"

"I went across the fields."

Mr. Deacon caned him, firstly for being out without leave, secondly for having lied about it; and Harry would have accepted the punishment without troubling his head if, when it was over, the master had not talked for some minutes on the iniquity of trying to impose on him. The voice, which fell exasperatingly on the boy's ear, droned on, and a little hot feeling began to stir in Harry's heart,

to quicken, to increase. He felt a trickle over the scalp, and the trickle made him interject little breathless answers. They had the effect of further annoying Mr. Deacon. Why could not the boy own up to what was self-evident? Instead:

"I'm not accustomed, sir, to being told I'm a liar even by a master."

The hazel eyes stared defiance out of a white face.

"If you are impertinent I'll report you to the head master."

"I wish you would."

"Write me out a thousand lines."

" Certainly."

Harry marched off to the dormitory, uneasy but carrying off some of the honours. He had not knuckled under to "Bert"—Deacon's given name was Herbert—and it was a shame that when a boy did speak the truth he should not be believed. If he were reported to Dr. Waugh he would continue to speak it, and he had no doubt—not a shadow of a doubt—but that the great man would know it. Nevertheless Dr. Waugh was to him as awful, though not as unsympathetic, as his mother's god; he was, too, of the same stuff; and Harry knew the gods disapproved of everything pleasurable that a boy did.

He sat the following afternoon in the long classroom, a sheet of paper on the desk before him. He should have been writing out the thousand lines, but his pen was dry and the piece of quicksilver he thought of as his body was still. Not that he was at rest, but that his mind was concentrated on a momentous question.

V

Should he or should he not?

Under the question was a mounting sense of excitement, a feeling that warmed him, that tingled through that quiescent body. The vision of a ship sailing down the sea-roads, the vision he had brought from Bristol and which had been temporarily blotted out by skating, had returned. He saw it now, with himself on board, himself a part of that straining, leaping life; saw the roll and heave of water, the slope of decks, the strange crying of birds — saw it so clearly that he passed his tongue over his lips for the salt that should have been on them, saw it with such longing that he must lay his head on the desk with a dry sob.

A boy came into the classroom for a book he had forgotten — a whistling, careless boy, who, glancing at Harry, remembered that he had broken out of the house to go skating.

"I say, you've got a nerve."

"Bert didn't believe me."

"The chap's a putrid ass. Can't think where the old War-horse got him. What's he given you?"

"A thousand lines."

" Phew!"

He lingered for a few minutes, hunting in impossible places for the lost book. "I say, Bear, next time you get up to larks, you might let me come too?"

Harry shook his head. "There won't be any next

time. I'm fed up with this place."

He had had enough of Cheeley, where if you did tell the truth you weren't believed. He had had enough of sitting on a form at a desk. He had had enough of being

caged and driven, of being shut in such a little, little cage.

"Oh, well," said the other boy vaguely, and went off,

whistling.

Mr. Deacon, looking idly out of an upper window while he waited for Mrs. Deacon in order that they might return some calls and drink some lukewarm tea in the drawing-rooms of other masters, had his interest quickened by the sight of a small boy walking down the road. Harry should have been shut in the long schoolroom, at work on the thousand lines. Mr. Deacon stared, but there was no mistaking the thick-set figure, the air as of an engine, compact, well oiled, and with every part in working order. In one hand the boy held a cricketing-bag. He was walking at a round pace — almost, Mr. Deacon thought whimsically, as if he had to catch a train.

"I told him to stay in till the lines were written," said the master to himself. "The young beggar! I'll give it to him when he comes back."

But Harry did not come back.

Robert Hall, standing beside his brother-inlaw on the quay-side, was watching an old tub, laden with fruit from Spain, make fast. Unless they had been misinformed, his errant nephew was on board.

"I haven't asked them to."

"Thought you were so keen on book-learning."

"The boy has had his chance."

"Found you couldn't keep his nose to the grindstone, eh?"

Mr. King nodded gloomily. To him scholarship was a key which unlocked doors. Through these doors, closed to him, their father, his other sons would walk. They would walk away from him, and he would be content. He had toiled in order to give them the opportunity; they had rewarded him by grasping it. When he saw them moving on an equality among the great ones of the earth he would be more than content. The wind blew out the skirts of his black shabby coat, the coat of a man who sat all day on an office-stool.

"I don't know as it matters," continued Robert Hall.

"There's some born to bide at home and look after things; but there's others as take their education from

going up and down the earth."

"'A rolling stone —'" said Mr. King bitterly. "I wanted my boys to do well."

"Ay, it's all doing, but what's doing? This little chap

of yours'll be a man, and you can't be more'n that."
"You are not ambitious, Robert." He spoke a little fretfully, for his brother-in-law had a way of declaring all sorts of fine, embossed vessels to be storehouses of rubbish.

"What are you going to do with Richard?"

The father smiled, that smile of confidence in an ideal. Richard who had taken scholarships, who was going to Oxford, Richard would justify him.

"Civil Service," he said modestly, and saw his son dispensing justice, taking with an easy swagger his place among the rulers, receiving after years of honourable service, a star, a riband . . .

"A perch for a tame bird, seed and water, and perhaps a bath! And James?"

But Mr. King did not answer. He had been watching the orange-laden ship and had, at last, caught sight of that for which he was looking. Towards him, across the worn grey stones of the quay, came a blithe lad, in his hand an old red-and-yellow carpet-bag. Sea winds had blown away the last vestiges of the delicacy left by rheumatic fever, and Harry was twice the boy who a month earlier had gone down the school road in a hurry. The little craft caught sight of Mr. King, whose city clothes made him an unusual figure in the waterside crowd, and for a moment hung in the wind. That figure reminded the boy of a certain strap hanging from a certain nail. He had intended, on reaching Bristol, to take the few shillings owing to him and ship again, this time on a longer voyage.

"The young devil thinks he is going to have his hide tanned," said the father, and the fact that he was glad to see his boy, to be relieved of an unacknowledged anxiety, brightened his face. Harry, reading the signs aright and, on the whole, pleased to see a familiar figure, came up to the men.

"Where have you been?"

" To Spain."

"Why did you go?"

"Dunno." His going was ancient history.

"Well, come on now to the station. There's a train in half an hour."

Harry yielded without so much as a backward glance. He walked beside his father, answering that father's questions as to the voyage — opening out, in fact, as soon as he saw that he was to escape punishment. Under his prattle, however, lay resolve, the resolve to return. Having once asserted his independence, he could do it again.

And Mr. King was conscious of this underlying hardness. Harry could feed and clothe himself and Harry knew it.

The father had realized that the stairway of books was not one his boy could climb, and he knew of no other that led to social consideration. If there were no Jacob's ladder for Harry, however, at least he should have a trade. In the railway pie were plums for the "little Jack Horners," if only they would be "good boys"; and, whether or no Harry "steadied down," trained fingers would enable him, at all times and in all countries, to earn a living.

II

[&]quot;I want to go to sea."

[&]quot;You are going into the works."

[&]quot;I want to get about a bit and see the world."

[&]quot;A right engineer gets about nearly as much as a sailor and earns better money."

Harry considered. "They have engineers on board ship."

"Later on you might have a try for the Navy."

In the end it was agreed between father and son that Harry should sandwich between the hard slices of apprenticeship any meat of travel that might offer. In this way, during the next five years his feet trod the cobblestones of Copenhagen, he saw Stamboul with the morning sun upon its domes, and drove more than once through a stiff gale in the Bay.

He had gone into the railway shops a little reluctantly, but given a job on a nut-lathe, found it more to his taste than anything that had had to do with books. Cleverness Harry regarded as a quality that had nothing to do with capacity. Though proud of Richard as a credit to the family, he had for his scholarship a secret contempt. He felt, though he could not have found words to express his thought, that the scholar is the amateur, playing at life, that his brilliant display is of no value, that a man should spend his strength making something of practical value to the community. The opportunity to do this having been given him, he accepted it without enthusiasm but with the conviction that he was on the right tack. Though his inclinations favoured a wandering life, a life of fighting and adventure, in him was the sober idealism of his father and the strange quality of a dead grandfather, presumably Russian, who, fleeing from tyranny, had scattered the seed of his dreams on English soil.

"How did you get on?" asked Mr. King, joining the boy as he left the works at the end of the first day.

"All right."

"There are as good chaps in the engineering shops as anywhere else."

Harry, who had been listening to the men's talk, wished

that Mr. King could have heard it. He had noticed however, that on his father's appearance other men fell silent.

"They play shove-ha'penny." He had seen a group of middle-aged men in the toolmakers' shop intent on their game.

"The apprentices may," said Mr. King, "but don't you follow their example. Your foreman, now — do as

he does and you'll be all right."

The foreman had been among the players; his eyes had had a glint in them, his hatchet-face had been eager, it had been evident he was enjoying himself. Harry resolved that he would try his hand at shove-ha'penny.

"You're in a fine muck," said his mother, as he followed Mr. King into the house. "Take the dipper and

go out into the yard."

"He can't wash in the yard," expostulated Mr. King.

"He can't wash in my clean scullery."

"But, er — the people next door . . ."

"They won't be looking over the wall, and besides, he isn't a girl."

Harry, discarding his greasy clothes for an old but clean suit, proceeded to cram his leisure hours with oc-

cupation.

"Born in a hurry," said Mrs. King as she watched him bolt his tea, "and been in a hurry ever since." But before long a period was set to Harry's hurryings. While filing an axle his shirt-sleeve was caught in the machinery. Being stout, the stuff held, and though Harry, awake to his danger, wrenched at it with all his strength, the arm was drawn in. Such accidents being of frequent occurrence in engineering shops, the limb was quickly extricated and the bone set. Harry was told to go home, and, though a little dizzy, it did not occur to him to go

in any but the usual way. With coat slung across the damaged arm — for, much as he liked the limelight, he was not proud of having been caught napping — he staggered through the streets. One of the curates of St. Luke's passed him with a greeting, but the words, though they reached his ear, had an impersonal sound, and he did not answer.

"Do you see that boy?" said the curate to his companion. "His father attends our church. Shocking, isn't it?"

The friend, glancing after Harry, noticed only the uncertain gait. "There ought to be a law that lads of that age are not to be supplied with anything stronger than lemonade!"

As Harry came out of the gates the timekeeper, a family man, had asked if he would like somebody to go home with him, and the boy had shaken his head. He did not feel ill, only languid. His arm ached, and between him and the sounds and movement of the town was a thin mist; he looked through it and saw men as trees walking. He himself was lapped in a curious stillness, and though he saw and heard, the voices and the figures remained outside the mist. It was odd but not unpleasant. He wished, however, that it were not so great an effort to lift and set down his feet, he could get on more quickly. As he turned into the quiet road, lined with houses of which the last was his home, his fancy ran before him to the end. He saw it vividly - the house Mr. King had built with his savings! One step and another step. Strange how often he seemed to be slipping over the curb, and now the trees were as men walking and the houses leaned out of the perpendicular. How funny of them! He wished he could laugh, but for some reason laughter was beyond him; all he could do was to lift those heavy feet one after another, one after the other. . . .

When Mrs. King came to the door she found her son lying in an untidy heap on the rough granite of the step.

III

The arm healed by first intention, but not before Harry's restless energy had turned three admiring little sisters into pillars of exasperation. "I hate you," said Bet, and Nancy joined in the chorus; even little Mab, mourning a beheaded doll, muttered, "'Ates you! Bad boy! 'Ates you!"

At a loose end, Harry took his idle hands into the highways and byways, and the little girls, hugging menaced treasures, rejoiced to see him go. His mother, too busy with her domestic duties to spare time for him, merely put a perfunctory question.

"Where are you going?"

"Up the street."

"Ay, but where?"

"For a walk."

"Then don't get into mischief."

At the top of the town was a little pub in which congregated those abandoned boys who play Snooker and Crown and Anchor.

They also drank a little beer. Harry joined them in the games but not in the beer — his father did not approve of beer-drinking and his father was a good man. Good? Did good mean a person who refrained because it was his nature to refrain? He, Harry, meant to experiment with the forbidden fruit. He only did not drink beer because he did not like the taste.

IV

When Richard and James came from school for the holidays they found Harry in possession of the attic to which age gave them the prior claim. His belongings had overflowed into every drawer of the chest and he occupied the more comfortable of the two beds.

"Look here, Bear, you've got to muck in with James;

that's my bed."

"It isn't, then. This is my room; I have it all the year round and you're only home for the holidays. I say, James, stop that."

James was industriously turning out the contents of the middle drawer, preparatory to replacing them with the clothes he had brought from school. The only notice

he took was to dump a heap of shirts on the floor.

In the scrimmage that ensued it looked for a moment as if Harry would get the better of it. This could not be allowed. The youngster was already a good deal too cocky, and seniority must prevail. Richard intervening, matters were arranged to the satisfaction of the older boys, and Harry, darkly surmising that a day would come, accepted his fate. The fact was that, though nothing would have induced him to give up his rights — or other people's — without a struggle, the return of his brothers had excited and pleased him. He was a full-blown apprentice, a wage-earner, but the others were public-school men!

From the moment of their arrival he had hung about, listening to their talk of Cheeley, and, almost, he found it in his wild heart to envy them.

"You going to bed?" he asked Richard. It was after ten and the older boys had begun to peel. "I'm not particular. Why?"

"Let's have a jape."

Richard rolled up his tie and put it on the mantel-shelf.

"What sort of a jape?"

"I dare you to play Captain Webb." A spirit in his feet had drawn Harry down the room, and he now stood by the hearth, his eyes observant of his brother. Richard with his well-cut clothes, his toilet niceties, his lordly manner, was to the roughly dressed lad the incarnation of splendour. Harry decided to let his mother go to chapel by herself the following Sunday; he would accompany Richard to church. He would let the railway town know this was his brother!

"Captain Webb?" Richard got out his razors and put them on the washstand. Razors!

"Yes; you know — when he dashes in and saves the child."

James, having unpacked to the last tie and handkerchief, sauntered idly towards them. "What's this?"

Harry turned. James did not count; he was neither this nor that. "You daren't play Captain Webb from the chest of drawers to our bed."

"What - jump?"

"Yes. You drive across, then swim over and get the child — just as it's sinking for the third time!"

The others looked at the gulf, full a dozen feet from chest to bed, and Richard shook his head. "No, Bear, can't be done."

"Pooh! I've done it."

"When the bed was nearer the chest."

"No, as they are."

"Go on, Old Blow-Hard."

"I'll show you, then."

Swinging himself on to the chest, he sprang off, alighting on the mattress of the double bed in a spread-eagle. Working his arms and legs, he propelled himself smoothly over the further side.

"See? You dive, then you swim. The child is here." He reappeared, holding the boots Richard had just kicked off. "Here it is."

"I'll have a shot." Richard climbed on to the chest of drawers and jumped. James followed. The leap was well within their powers.

"Let's see who can do it quickest," said Harry, after each had rescued the boots as often as he wished.

"How?" James asked the question — James who had been nicknamed by his father "the Old Codger" because in his veins ran something more like blood than quick-silver.

"We'll each do it three times running and time ourselves by Richard's watch."

"All right."

The striking of active bodies in quick succession on the mattress had pushed it aside, leaving the iron framework of the bed exposed. Moreover, the leap proving easily negotiable and no interruption coming from outside, the boys had grown careless. They laughed and shouted as

they jumped.

"I'll go first," said Richard, handing his watch to James. Though Harry had invented the game, he must be made to remember he was only the little brother; and Harry was content. He stood looking on. Richard's jumps were neat and finished, he was like a cat; but James scrambled, he took off clumsily, he fell like a sack of potatoes, he did not at once swim headlong over the side. "I'm quicker than James," thought the little brother.

When his turn came he launched himself laughingly into space. He felt sure of his landing, so sure that he did not look before he sprang away. If only he could do the three dives in as short a time as Richard; not so neatly, of course, but in as short a time! His heart was whispering to him of a quicker leap and a quicker.

James, clumsy and heavy, had thrust the mattress yet further from the iron edge of the bedstead, and Harry, leaping too hastily, fell short. Picking himself up, he

staggered to the nearest chair.

"I've cut my leg."

"I don't wonder!" Conscious that he had not done well, James felt an ugly satisfaction in his brother's mishap, felt it until he saw the cut. "Oh, I say, Bear . . ."

"Here, let's see," and then Richard too stood silent.

Falling with considerable force on the iron edge, Harry had laid open his leg in a diagonal cut, a couple of inches below the knee. The blood was running down the limb, dripping on to the oilcloth, gathering in a dark little pool.

"Why, you've cut it to the bone!" cried James, realizing, with some excitement, that the hardness behind the

gash was actually the bone of his brother's leg.

"Horrible!" said Richard, and proceeded, sombrely, to hunt for a handkerchief. "I'll do it up for you."

Harry was twisting himself round so as to get a glimpse of the bone. He was more interested than horrified. "Never seen one of my bones before. You know, I broke my arm last half, but it didn't come through."

"What will father say?" asked James, waking to an-

other aspect of the matter.

Mr. King was a man who kept order in his household, exercising a wholesome discipline. They should have been in bed and asleep. The boys looked at each other in consternation. Even Richard, that great man who had

won a scholarship which would take him to Balliol, trembled as he thought of the just wrath of that greater man, his father.

"And who," pursued James, "is going to tell him?"

Richard, by this time busily bandaging the cut in the rough-and-ready fashion of the football field, showed no inclination to claim his rights as the eldest; and James was never one to put himself forward. Remained Harry, who felt that his father would blame him as originator of the unlucky "jape." The others, being only that day from school, would be treated with leniency, but there was little hope for him. Glancing at his leg, he saw that the blood was soaking through the white bandage. His father would be very angry, justifiably angry. It would be wise, perhaps, to wait till morning.

"Don't let's bother about it tonight."

Richard, washing his ensanguined hands, wondered if they might put off the reckoning. "Well, but there's your leg. . . ."

"That's just it. I'm always getting into scrapes."

"What do you think, James?"

"I don't know." He had decided that he would do nothing. The accident, such an unlooked-for ending to a silly but harmless game, made him feel angry. He had not deserved it. The Codger was a good lad and, as his mother said, no trouble. It annoyed him to think that the first evening he was back from school he should have got into mischief. He hadn't either; it was Harry—Harry who was always in hot water. Oh, confound Harry!

Richard, catching a glimpse of his brother's set face, saw that "Old Jimmy" did not mean to help.

"The pater will hold us responsible."

That was the worst of it. Harry had invented the

game but they would be held responsible. "I don't care."

Richard, knowing that in face, height, and build he resembled his father, struck one of Mr. King's attitudes and menaced the others with an uplifted hand. His consternation was passing. Sufficient unto the day... "At your age — ought to have known better — thought I could have trusted you — a bad example for Harry! As long as he's here by himself no trouble — no trouble at all — but directly you come home..."

A chuckle from Harry.

"Oh, stow it, Richard!" But the Codger's voice was less morose. "Look here, you can do as you like, but I'm going to bed," and he began to push the mattress into place.

"Me, too," said Harry, and tried to limp across from chair to bed. "Wow! this fellow's got me." He could not put his foot to the ground.

Richard, with considerable effort — for Harry, though short, was even then heavy — lifted him on to the bed. "Is it still bleeding?"

"It feels as if it were. Don't you think you'd better put another handkerchief over it?"

James, at full length, was beginning to feel sleepy. "It'll mess the bed if you don't."

Richard readjusted the bandage. "How's that?"

"All right." Supported by the springy mattress, the leg felt easier.

"Comfortable? Do you think you'll go to sleep?"

"Rather."

Turning out the gas, Richard got into bed. It was late and he was tired. He thought kindly of the little brother on the far side of the room and, hoping the cut would not prove serious, fell asleep. James also slept,

and even Harry was able to doze. But not for long. "I say, Richard!"

A grunt. Richard turned over and slept again.

"Richard!"

" Um-m."

"Wish you'd turn up the gas."

"What for?" Richard's grasp on events had slipped.

"My leg feels damp; I believe it's coming through the other handkerchief."

"Oh, go to sleep."

"I — can't." The voice dropped unhappily, almost broke, and Richard came to himself.

"Let's have a look at it. By gum, yes, it's still bleeding." He went to the drawer that contained his hosiery. "We shall have to go slow, I've only two more handkerchiefs."

"That'll be enough."

"Not if it goes on till morning."

"It's nearly morning now."

"Oh, no."

"I've been awake hours and hours."

Richard looked at his watch. "It's ten minutes to two."

He went back to bed, and Harry, half-relieved to find that his leg was not bleeding as freely as he had supposed yet half-disappointed, settled down again. To Richard it seemed as if he had only been asleep a minute when the little brother's voice once more broke in upon his dreams.

"Richard, it's trickling down my leg."

Four or five times that night he was called on to minister to Harry. Considering the size of the cut and that the bone had been laid bare, the bleeding was not excessive. A very little blood, however, goes a long way; and, in

spite of the boys' care, the sheets showed a confusion of crimson.

"Mother will be on to us about this," said Richard at last, but the long hours of pain and sleeplessness had made Harry indifferent.

"I don't care."

Richard, tightening the knot of his last handkerchief, saw that the boy's face, always of the milky tone which holds a suggestion of blue, was shadowed almost to greyness. "We ought to have gone to the pater last night, I can't think why we didn't."

"It doesn't matter."

The increasing brightness of the morning sky was shaming the gas-jet, and Richard put his hand to the tap. "I wish we had now."

V

No need that day to call the boys, they were up and dressing as soon as the household was astir. As they moved about they conferred as to what should be done, but without coming to a conclusion. How were they to account to their parents for the state of Harry's leg? They went to breakfast with lagging steps and, not knowing what to say, said nothing.

"Where's Henry?"

Mr. King had discovered the empty chair. The question not being addressed to any one in particular, was left unanswered.

"Isn't he up yet?"

He turned to James, who sat on his left; and the Codger, drinking coffee, murmured something and began to cough.

"You don't think so?" Mr. King, the bacon on his

plate half-eaten, pushed back his chair. "He isn't often late."

Going to the foot of the stairs, he called on the absent one, who, though he heard, thought it advisable to lie low.

- "Henry! Henry!" A pause. "The boy must be asleep!" Conscious of something unusual in the atmosphere, Mr. King, forgetful of congealing bacon-fat, ran up the stairs. "Henry! Get up."
 - "I can't, father."

" Eh?"

"I've got a bad leg."

"Now then, none of your shamming, you lazy young dog!" He thought the boy was scheming for a day off with his brothers. "Let's have a look at it."

Harry, pulling himself up in bed, displayed the blood-stained bandages.

"Hullo! What is this?" Mr. King, still unbelieving, unfastened them. He knew boys, a humbugging set of rascals! The blood, drying on the handkerchief, had glued it to the leg, and Mr. King, giving it a tug, was confronted suddenly with the gaping cut. His face changed. "How did you do it?"

"I fell against the edge of the bed."

" When?"

"Last night."

"Why didn't you let me know?"

"I thought it would be all right in the morning."

The attic window was between the bed and the chest of drawers. Mr. King did not stay for further parley. Harry heard his steps on the oilcloth of the stairs, heard a door bang, and from his eyrie saw his father running up the street. The coat-tails of the long black figure were flying, the hat was set on carelessly, he seemed to

be wearing seven-league boots. In a moment he had reached the corner, turned it and was out of sight.

Could he — the voung heart swelled with importance — oh, could he be going for the doctor?

Chapter VI

I

ARRY, on the horsehair sofa at the end of the long room, was wishing that Satan—he preferred Satan, as that agency gave more interesting results—would find employment for his idle hands. His leg, still useless, was stretched stiffly out. The doctor had told him that very soon the cut would be healed and the limb as good as ever, but the "very soon" of middle age seemed to poor Harry "very long." His sofa was across the one window of the lodging-house parlour, and from where he lay he could see the tide of holiday-makers flowing towards the beach; he could even hear the shouts of children at play on the sands. On reaching the lodging-house he had been settled on the sofa. The others had gone on an exploring expedition, but Henry must rest.

Turning impatiently from the window, he let his discontented glance rove about the room. What an ugly room! On the walls was a shiny paper such as his father had put over the bathroom at home, but the bathroom paper was in blue-and-white squares and this was muddy brown. The bathroom, too, smelt of soap and hot but fresh air; it gave him a peculiarly pleasant sensation. This place had quite the opposite effect; it spoke to him, not of a clean freshness, but of food. He liked the smell of roasting and frying meats — he thought it, indeed, a most delicious scent, far above roses; but in the air of this room lingered the smell of eaten meats! In the

78

centre was an oblong table covered with dark, shiny American cloth. The legs of it had been hacked by generations of young seaside visitors, and Harry looked at it thoughtfully. It was reminiscent of all the meals that had been eaten in this room. It spoke of stained knives, of plates greasy with particles of skin and fat; but it spoke also of restless feet — feet that twined round the chair-legs, that struck in their exuberant life against the solid mahogany, denting and scoring it. Harry sighed. When would he be able to hack a table-leg again?

The note of comfort in the room was a warm red carpet. It rolled from his sofa to the mahogany sideboard at the end of the oblong space, the wave of colour being broken by faint hints of pattern. To the owner it was evidently an article to be preserved with care, for narrow widths of oilcloth had been laid from door to fireplace, before the sideboard and by the table. The little shiny paths caught Harry's eye; underneath them the carpet would be a vet warmer and richer red. He promised himself that as soon as he could get about, he would prise up the tacks and have a look. He liked the carpet; red was his favourite colour, and it was thick, thicker than the carpet in the dining-room at home. A rummy idea to put oilcloth down here and there! His mother said she had six pairs of feet running over her floors, but equalized the wear and tear by changing her carpets round. He felt he could not approve of the little oilcloth paths; it showed in the landlady, Mrs. Gudge, a fussy mind, and fussy landladies were a terror.

Why had his parents taken these particular rooms? He had heard them say they feared Northpool would be full and that they would have a difficulty in securing lodgings. Left in the station waiting-room while they went to see what could be got, he had felt a little anxious.

Supposing all the lodgings in Northpool were taken, what would they - the whole family of them - do? Would they be allowed to sleep on the beach? He had heard of people being packed, heads and tails like sardines, on the billiard-room table of a public-house; and he thought of himself lying among his brothers and sisters, with his mother at one end, his father at the other. But no, his father would never consent to take refuge in a publichouse, it would be the beach for them; and he wondered whether they would know when the tide turned or whether it would come coldly lapping round them in the night. As a bedroom the beach did not seem to him all that could be desired, and while his mind was still anxiously concentrated on the problem of bed or no bed his parents had come back. They had been wonderfully fortunate; the first house at which they had called had had rooms to let. They had been jubilant over their success, and Harry, too, had been pleased. No beach, no chilly, creeping water for him, but a bed under a roof. As he lay on the sofa, following with his glance the pattern on the little oilcloth paths, he felt less pleased. There was something about the room . . .

For one thing, it was dark. Mrs. Gudge, saying the sun would take the colour out of her carpet, had insisted on lowering the Venetian blind. One could, of course, look between the slats, but it had been another proof that she was fussy. He hated a dark room. Why, he could hardly get the sense of the illuminated texts that hung on the walls! "God is Love" was over the fireplace, and facing it "Jesus Wept"; but what were the words in black and gold, above the sideboard? He could distinguish the capitals, a V, an M, I, R and L, but the smaller letters baffled him. As soon as he could stand on his recalcitrant leg he would go down the room and,

however long it took, would extract from that cardboardoblong its meaning.

For the present, however, to decipher it was beyond him, and presently his glance dropped to the piece of mahogany that stretched below. The surface of this was covered with jars and tins and those bulgy, crackly, lightbrown parcels that came from the grocer.

As soon as Mrs. King had entered into possession of her temporary home she had begun to unpack. Her husband obtained their stores from the Railway Buying Association. Firkins of butter, sides of bacon, boxes of eggs, farm products of all sorts, came from country districts up and down the line, and from these stores Mrs. King, bearing in mind the high prices charged by seaside shops during the season, had made a careful selection. The lid of the big case having been prised open, she had been methodically sorting out the contents when Richard intervened.

"Now, mother, none of this! Come and smell the sea-

Mrs. King, never able to withstand the blandishments of her first-born, had protested. "I ought to finish unpacking these groceries."

"Just put out what we want for tea. There, that

tongue and the strawberry jam."

"Oh, Richard, do mind my cap!"

Harry, looking on from the sofa, wished he could be of the party. He remembered the joy in other summers of that first rush to the sea. "Isn't it — isn't it tea-time?" he asked desperately, as one after another the children slipped away.

"Not for another hour," said Richard, as he drew his mother's not altogether unwilling hand under his arm.

"Don't be long," called Harry after them, but in the

surge of chattering voices his plea was lost. The sounds passed away, a dry dunt of sand-shoes on the asphalt—the excited trebles of his little sisters, the deeper note of his father (who was to stay over the week-end), all thinning gradually to a vague murmur of sound.

Harry, a little choky, wondered for the thousandth time why that clumsy idiot of a James had not noticed he was pushing the mattress aside, leaving the iron edge of the bedstead exposed? But it was no good worrying over that now; the mischief was done. He - innocent victim of a brother's carelessness - was tied to this hard rounded, uncomfortable sofa while the others . . . He choked again. What were the others doing? Looking for things in the pools? Paddling? He thought of a queer creature he had found the previous year. The colour of the weed, it had been moving slowly across the sandy bottom of a pool. It had had brown tubes in its back, tubes that in a land animal would have been concealed by a neat and decent skin. He had lain for a long time by the pool, watching it and wondering about the tubes. Somebody had told him the creature was a seaslug and that it ate the weed. He had never been fortunate enough to find another, but perhaps this year

He remembered there was to be no paddling for him, no dredging up of sea-creatures from pools left by the ebbing tide.

He turned on the hard sofa with an impatient jerk. What a long time the others were away! They were having a good time and had forgotten the poor boy at home. They would not think of returning until hunger drove them. He looked longingly at the heap of groceries on the sideboard—six little packets of tea, two tins of cocoa, a ham, the box of Primrose soap, and, flanking

them in a friendly group, jars of jam and marmalade and potted meat. What had his mother intended them to have for tea? Richard had said tongue, but Harry was in favour of potted meat. It was home-made and you were given a good lump of it, enough to spread over several slices of bread. Tongue, being a delicacy, was cut thin; it melted in your mouth. He planned a tea in which tongue was dealt with as generously as potted meat—a tea of unlimited thickly buttered toast, of piledup strawberry jam. He shut his eyes in order to visualize more clearly the rich abundance of the spread.

A sound disturbed him, and he found that the afternoon had slipped away. The shadows had thickened in the long room, and it was so dark he could hardly distinguish the person who had come in to lay the cloth. A white cap gave substance to a shadowy head, a wide lace collar stretched from a broad but rounded back to a full bosom. The landlady had come in person to attend to the wants of her lodgers. Harry, his eyes growing accustomed to the dusk, was able to distinguish the pale disk of a large shiny face as the woman, opening a drawer in the table, took out a cloth. She turned to the sideboard, and he wondered if she were going to tidy away the stores his mother had tumbled hastily out of the big case.

In the hall a lamp had been lighted, and its beams fell through the open doorway on to the woman's figure. Harry saw that Mrs. Gudge was examining the parcels, reading the labels on the pots and tins, weighing in her hand the knobbly packages on which was only a pencil hieroglyph to mark the contents. As she lifted them they gave forth a little crisp sound, suggestive of compression and tense paper. How often had Harry watched the grocer make up packets of tea or rice or currants. First came the plumping on the counter of the full blue or

brown bag, then the folding-in of the top, then from the brown box the swift running of the new string, and, after the tying, the smart jerk and the parcel handed over to you. But what was Mrs. Gudge doing with his mother's parcels?

"Are you going to lay supper?" he asked, and the

stout figure spun round.

"You mustn't startle me like that. I've — I've a heart."

"I thought you wanted something."

"These things ought to have been put away."

Harry could not understand why she should speak as if the litter of groceries was an annoyance. "They don't matter there."

"I like a place kept tidy."

"My mother will put them away when she comes back."

"I hope she will. Anyway, I can't be running after people all day long. I've something else to do."

"I suppose you've other lodgers?"

"What's that to do with you?"

Harry thought her a disagreeable person, but then grown-ups so frequently kept their civilities for each other. He did not attempt to relieve his boredom by further chat, but watched her setting out the knives and forks, the cups and saucers. Everything was laid a little obliquely, even the cloth hung on a gradual slant. "So like a woman," he thought, "no eye."

The return wave of sand-shoes was beginning to flow, and Mrs. Gudge lighted a lamp in readiness. Harry, remembering his difficulty with the text, studied the long black letters afresh. "V-ven-vengeance!" Ah yes, he had it: "Vengeance is Mine, I will Repay, saith the Lord."

It was a text any boy could understand, for to repay

was wholly enjoyable. As far as he could, Harry repaid all blows, kicks, harsh words and other injuries bestowed on him, repaid them with interest, made a point of giving good measure, of bearing them in mind until the debt was paid. He understood that the Lord, too, found it enjoyable to lie in wait for the unwary, to bestow, when opportunity served, the kick or buffet that was owing. Harry had thought that God, an old gentleman on a big blue throne, an old gentleman surrounded by feathered and squawking angels, had a pretty dull time of it, but this insistence on vengeance led the boy to revise his judgment. God avenged not only His own wrongs but those of other people. No doubt there were flabby creatures who would be content with this. He, Harry, would do his own repaying, but he could understand that those who could not stand up for themselves might be glad of help; could understand, too, what a good time God, for ever hunting, ambushing, waylaying the wrong-doer, must have!

II

A bustle in the tiled hall apprised him of the family's return, and his father came in carrying Mab.

"I should put the child to bed; she doesn't seem to me a bit well."

"She is only tired after the journey," said Mrs. King.

"She's got a very heavy cold. Look how her eyes are running."

"Well, you take her upstairs. I've got the tea to see to."

Mr. King, still carrying little Mab, went out of the room, and his wife, turning to the sideboard, began to lay the groceries on the shelves of a cupboard.

"Dear me, I thought there were six packets of tea,"

she said in a puzzled tone. "Richard, didn't I put out six packets?"

"I don't remember, mother."

"There were six," said Harry suddenly.

"There are only five now." At that moment Mrs. Gudge came in carrying a tray. "Do you know if any of the things I left on the sideboard have been touched?"

Mrs. Gudge directed an oblique glance down the room.

"Your son's been 'ere all the time."

" Well?"

"I can't say what he's been up to."

"He can't move off the sofa."

"Oh, can't 'e? You never know what boys can do."

"Did you touch the tea, Henry?"

" No."

"Well, I can't bother about it now, but I certainly thought there were six packets."

"Anyway," reiterated Mrs. Gudge with heavy triumph, "your boy was 'ere all the time."

III

Little Mab's indisposition was due neither to the journey nor a cold, and a few days later Mrs. King wrote to her husband to say the child had developed measles. "I shall be glad to see you at the week-end, for the landlady is disagreeable about it. She says it has prevented her taking another party and that we ought to pay for the empty rooms. She is bone-idle and a regular harpy."

When Mr. King reached Prospect Villa he found the front door open and the sitting-room empy. A murmur of voices in the upper part of the house led him to the stairs, and, following the sound, he was presently at the door of his little daughter's bedroom.

"Can I come in?"

"Oh, Henry, is it really you?" The relief in his wife's voice was so intense he had a wondering fear. What had been the matter? Measles was only a trifling ailment. With the exception of Mab, the family had had it, and it had been see-saw, down one day and up the next, but no one ill, not really ill. In Mrs. King's voice, however, was a note suggestive of strain, of weariness, and his heartbeats quickened.

But in the sunny bedroom was nothing to justify his fatherly apprehensions. Little Mab was already sitting up, and before her, on the pleasant land of counterpane, was a Noah's Ark with sundry unpainted additions made by Harry. Mr. King's glance turned from the convalescent child to its mother. The colours of his comely wife were faded; she looked worn.

"What is it, my dear?"

"Oh, Henry!" Her eyes swam, and for once in her capable maturity she clung to him. "That woman! We've had such a time."

Bit by bit he gathered that Mrs. Gudge had revealed herself, as not only grasping, but unkind. She had declined to come into their rooms, which she said were "infected," and though she cooked the food, she would not serve it. The dishes were placed on a slab outside the kitchen door and the King family were left to do as best they could.

"Did you tell the doctor?"

"Oh, no, Henry."

"I shall, then. Has he been today?"

"He generally comes about now." She went to the window. "That's his dogcart opposite No. 6. He won't be long."

Events favoured them, for Mr. King, on entering, had

closed the front door, and the doctor had to ring for admittance; he had to ring more than once.

"I thought you was one of my lodgers," Mrs. Gudge said.

"Well, but you don't keep them waiting, do you?" retorted Dr. Keenan.

"Oh, them!" she said, and tossed her head.

The doctor glanced at her keenly. "Same trouble, Mrs. Gudge?"

She did not meet his eye. "That? It wasn't my fault."

"Then you should have taken it into court."

"Can't afford no lawyers' bills."

"No — well." He went on up the stairs to where Mr. King was waiting for him.

"She agreed to do the work, but for a week now she has not been inside our rooms, and, having our little girl ill, my wife finds it more than she can manage."

"Ah," said Dr. Keenan. "Yes — I'll speak to Mrs. Gudge. I think it will be all right now; but if not, you must let me know."

"I didn't like to trouble you."

"A doctor's would be an easy job if he had only to physic the ills of the flesh."

"But I thought . . ."

"Ah, so did I till I left the hospital."

He ran down the stairs calling, "Mrs. Gudge! Mrs. Gudge!" and the Kings could hear her steps on the oilcloth of the kitchen, her slow, dragging steps as she came to the door.

"Where's that prescription," he began. Then he was drawn in and the door shut.

"Prescription! What prescription?" said Mrs. King. "The woman isn't ill?"

Mr. King had turned on the wee convalescent. "Did Henry make these cows and sheep? Good old Henry! By the by," he glanced up, "how is he?"

"Dr. Keenan took the plaster off yesterday."

"Leg all right?"

"Gone to skin and bone."

"Ah, but Henry'll see to that."

A rap sounded on the door. "Come in," said Mrs. King, and their landlady entered, carrying a jug of hot water. She did not look at them but went to the wash-stand and, puting it in the basin, covered it with a towel.

"Dr. Keenan told me to bring you some, and what

time would you be wanting supper tonight?"

"The usual time!" Mrs. King was recovering from her surprise. "I suppose you know the sitting-room hasn't been swept out for a week?"

"I'll do it this afternoon."

"The beds haven't been made or the slops emptied."

The woman did not answer, but they heard her go into the adjoining bedrooms, and, from the sounds, judged that she was setting to work with broom and duster.

"She will be all right now," said Mr. King. "Dr. Keenan made her realize she wasn't doing her duty by us.

You can see she means well."

"I'm not so sure," returned his wife.

"You always think the worst of people."

They sat down to supper that night in a comparatively clean room. "I'll have in the mutton, Mrs. Gudge."

"The mutton?"

"What was left of the shoulder."

"I've seen nothing but the bone."

"There was more than enough on it for Mr. King's supper. Please bring it in."

"Oh, that bone? I threw it in the dustbin."

As she went out of the room Mrs. King turned to her husband. "There, Henry!"

The younger Henry rentured a question. "Does she take our things, mother?"

"Don't interrupt me when I'm talking to your father."

"No, mother - but does she?"

"You can't leave a thing about," said Mrs. King, ignoring him. "That cocoa-tin on the mantelpiece! I filled it this morning. I was going to make you a cup tonight, but when I looked just now there wasn't half a spoonful left. She's got a name, Henry, and that's why her rooms were empty and why she didn't haggle about the price of them and why there are no other lodgers."

"Did you speak to her about the cocoa?"

"Yes, I did, and she said it was mice. Mice!"

Harry had watched this particular mouse at its nibbling, and mice suggested to his mind the harmless, necessary cat, but a cat big enough to cope with such a mouse — a big stripy cat, black on yellow. "It's a pity this isn't India," he said.

"It isn't as if we gave any extra trouble or wanted a lot of waiting on. I believe the woman drinks."

"Cocoa?" asked Mr. King with a smile.

"If she takes our things," said Harry thoughtfully and with an eye to the text over the sideboard, "I suppose the Lord will repay?"

With Mrs. King indignation had the upper hand. "If

only I could be sure He would!"

Her son blinked at her, his eyes bright in an unsmiling face. In his pocket was a knife that he had picked up on the beach, a knife with a dull edge. He decided to grind in into keenness. A knife was a good standby, you never knew when it might be useful. He nudged his

mother. "One more slice of bread and treacle?"

"No, really, Henry, you've had enough."

"Just one more."

"That four-pound tin was only opened on Friday."

A voice from the other end of the table. "Let the boy have his fill. Hungry times down here."

"He'll eat us out of house and home."

"I want them to have good food and plenty of it."

Mr. King looked with a feeling of deep paternal satisfaction at the vital faces, the strongly built bodies, of his progeny. They justified him. Richard's Oxford scholarship had been made possible by his father taking every well-paid job that offered. Mr. King had asked in return that his child, his children, should climb the hill of worldly success. He smiled at them as he ate, happy to think of these small, strong feet on the upward path, happy in his long dream of the pinnacle which they might eventually reach.

He ate dreamily, and behind each face gathered at the table were the individual thoughts of these beings who had come into existence because Henry King, walking one spring evening by the Manor Farm, had helped to disentangle a skirt caught by a briar! The same blood ran through all these pumping hearts, yet the thoughts of each were unknown to the others. Even the mother, of whose flesh they had been a part, knew nothing of what went on in the different minds, of what was going on under the dark thatch of the child who was nudging her for "bread and treacle — just one more slice."

IV

Only lately released from sofa bondage, Harry's little brain was full of plans. His leg, contrasting woefully with its fellow, was his chief concern. Exercises and a primitive rubbing of the muscles occupied part of his valuable time, but he was able to spare some - whole afternoons, in fact - for fishing in the pools, building sandworks on the edge of the tide, and other seaside pursuits. Through these satisfactory occupations ran, however, a thread of thought. He could not approve of the way in which Mrs. Gudge was treating his family. She took his mother's things; he knew she did. Also she was disagreeable. She made a fuss about the sand they brought into the house, about the noise, about the hot water. His mind returned from the contemplation of her many unpleasant ways to the one that seemed to him most reprehensible. She took his mother's things!

That was stealing, and she could be sent to prison for it; but, instead, his mother would only grumble. She would not do anything. He saw Mrs. Gudge, unamiable landlady, dishonest woman, getting off scot-free; getting off, too, with all the things she had taken. She would not, of course, go to heaven, but heaven was a long way off and Harry impatient. He wanted her to suffer for her sins, he wanted her to suffer now.

"Coming out, Bear?" asked Richard the last afternoon of their stay in Northpool. The pretty girl who had been staying next door was gone home and skies were overcast.

"No." Harry held in the palm of his hand the knife he had found; it had been ground to a fine edge.

"Well, then, don't! Nobody wants you."

As he took himself and his discontent out of the room Mrs. King turned to her youngest son. "Don't vou want to go out on your last afternoon?"

"I'm sleepy," lied Harry, and made for the horsehair

sofa. "I'll go presently."

Mrs. King had intended to make use of it herself; but a bed, she thought, would do just as well — be, in fact, more comfortable. As she walked upstairs she reflected on Harry's sleepiness and hoped he wasn't sickening for a disease. It was unlike him to lie down in the middle of the day.

Harry, at his short length, waited until the family had gone its several ways. His need was not for sleep but solitude, and as soon as he heard the bed creak under his mother's weight in the room over his head he went to the door. In all the house was no sound but Mrs. Gudge's voice addressing a neighbour on the other side of the wall. It filtered in by way of the back kitchen, and for a moment Harry, a queer smile on his lips, listened.

"I says to 'er, 'You've 'ad 'em in, every one of 'em,' and so she 'ad. Near? My word, she is that; but what can you expect? — those sort of people — in a very small way . . ."

An impulse to run out and show Mrs. Gudge up, accuse her of stealing, throw her sins in her wicked face, shook the boy. But no, he could do better than that. He raised his eyes to the text over the sideboard. "Vengeance is Mine." That was it. Vengeance should be his, and not at the end of life but now.

The oilcloth path, with smooth gleam, ran from door to fender. Loosening the ends, Harry rolled it back and surveyed the warmer rose of that space of carpet which had been hidden. What a rich colour! How lovely! He had never seen a carpet that he liked so much. He took out the knife he had so assiduously sharpened and, kneeling down, let the edge shear through a strand, a dark strand woven into the pattern. It parted, but the fraying edge of the wool covered the tiny slit. Harry's appetite for cutting grew. The woven threads were taut

under his knife; he drew the keen blade across them and they yielded. He felt them yield, and the little give thrilled him. Setting to work in earnest, he cut a few strands here, a few strands there, until in every foot of the carpet was a tiny, unnoticeable slit.

Mrs. Gudge was a bad woman. She should not steal his mother's tea. She should pay — that was it — pay for what she had taken. One more cut between the border and the carpet, another along the dark line of pattern, a bigger one where the concealing oilcloth would lie. When the time came for carpets to be taken up and beaten this one would fall to pieces. Ah, but just one more cut. She would never be able to relay it. "Mice!" she had said, and mice nibbled things, ruined them. A half-cut strand here, another there, and no sign, no sign at all that the mice had been busy.

Harry, his pixy soul aglow with satisfaction, trod the oilcloth into place and pressed home the tacks. The smell of decaying weed, the murmur of the beach, was drawing him. On his way out, however, he lingered for a moment before the black-and-gold text. God had become real to him, for God was some one who felt as he did in the important matter of enemies and vengeance. He understood about God now, this God Who punished sinners, who repaid.

And what fun it was too. He had enjoyed ruining that carpet. "Vengeance is Mine, I will Repay, saith the Lord."

Yes, no doubt, but the Lord could not expect to have all the fun.

N the warm, bright kitchen Mrs. King, subconsciously aware that autumn winds were tearing at the leaves with a wild lack of decorum, was making an applepie. Before her, on the board, was a lump of pastry, to be turned later into puffs and turnovers; and while she rolled the piecrust, she was considering whether she should get out a pot of raspberry jam or use what was left of the plum.

"Mrs. King - madam - are you there?"

A voice from the back door, a voice of pleasant masculine cadence, the mellowness of summer yet the roughness, that roughness of wind, of change, that had made her restless. She turned a brightening face towards the scullery.

"That you, Mr. Chew? Come in, please. I'm making pastry and can't leave it." She worked more quickly, fitting the crust over the cored apple-quarters, running a knife round the edges. She wanted the job finished, wanted to be free for the delights a visit from Chew, the tallyman, promised.

A tall man, stooping his head under the lintel, smiled at her across the bare scrubbed space. In this house he was sure of a welcome — at least from the mistress.

"Set down your pack, won't you?"

Although the case was light, being of wickerwork covered with dark brown American cloth, the goods were heavy, and Chew felt glad to lift the strap from his chest. He had journeyed far that day, and found it good to come

95

at evening into this homely place. With a red handker-chief, silk, for the tallyman had his niceties, he wiped his face; and Mrs. King's curious glance noted the change in the skin where the cap, pressing down his ruffle of short curls, had been pulled forward. A bonnie colour, she thought, warm, with faint yellows and reds under the cream, very much her own colour as a girl. What a world of difference there was between these tints and the sallow reds in a blue-white skin of her husband — ay, and of her children. Not a single one of her babies had been apple-skinned and fair. She had longed for a baby like the babies of her own family, and one after another dusky youngsters, with copper or black hair and milky skins, had been born to her.

"You'll let me make you a cup of tea?"

Outside, the brisk air had a nip in it, whipping the blood. "You're very kind, and I'll be glad of the tea if you'll have a cup with me." It would be pleasant to stretch his long legs before the fire, sitting in another man's chair, drinking out of another man's cup, making believe that both were his. "I was thinking of you last week, when I was in Nottingham." He would not let his appreciation of the buxom woman interfere with business. Throwing back the lid of his pack, he routed among the contents, seeking a certain package. "This is a new design. I got it cheap, and I've been keeping it for you." In the corner of the roomy kitchen was a horsehair sofa with curly ends. Tallyman, unfolding the parcel - curtains of machine-made cotton lace spread them widely over the black cushions. Well he knew that Mrs. King's weakness was curtains - to have cleaner, crisper curtains than her neighbours, than any woman in the road. He pandered to this weakness, but not only because he wanted to sell the contents of his

pack. "Directly my eye fell on it I seemed to see it

hanging in one of your windows."

"Why did you get it cheap?" She decided to use what remained of the plum jam; less trouble. She wanted to finish with the pastry, to be able to examine the contents of the pack—the dress goods, the household linens, all Tallyman had gathered from the factories up and down the country. She knew that he would let her have her will of the basket, that he would sit toasting his toes and watching her with his lazy, almost proprietorial smile. On the fire a kettle was singing; a moment more and it would boil. She would make the tea, and then—

He showed an inequality in the pattern. "The shuttle missed kissing," he said.

Mrs. King had not known that she required a new pair of Nottingham lace curtains. "I don't think," she said disparagingly, "I should care to have them if they are damaged."

He draped the border with cunning fingers. "It would never show and they are of good quality, worth a lot more than I shall ask you for them." She had seen the effect at a distance, but he brought them across to her to show the texture. "No dress in this and good stout stuff. They'll wash and wash."

The curtains were a bargain, handsomer than those Mrs. Jackets had put up last spring-cleaning and to be obtained at less cost. Mrs. King allowed her lips to relax, and Autolycus, tossing the curtains on to the ancient couch, put business out of his mind. The pie was almost ready in the oven, and Mrs. King's busy fingers were folding cored apple into paste, making a big turnover. The man, watching her, understood that it was for him — that, crisp and brown, it would be rolled into a bit of clean linen and slipped into his pocket.

"Eh," he said, "you are good to me. I tramp the country but my round ends at your door."

She gave a final twist to the turnover. "I wonder, Mr. Chew, that you've never settled down."

"No," he said, "you don't wonder."

- "Well, but you could have been a successful man, with a shop of your own, a big shop; you could have made money."
- "With a wife like you in the back premises? I'd have liked that fine the wife, I mean."
 - "Oh, nonsense, Mr. Chew."
 - "Strewth, I would; but not the shop."
 - "It would have been respectable."
 - "It would that."
 - "Now, when you're old --"
 - "Eh? I'll never be old; I'll die before that."
 - "In a ditch?"
- "Why not? Come to die, one place is as good as another."

The turnover was in the oven and she had laid tea on a corner of the kitchen-table. His eyes had a dancing light in them, they spoke to her over the domestic cup of other things than curtains.

He understood, indeed, as did no one else that in her, smothered by her fear of the common tongue, was a longing for something out of the ordinary. If life had been spiced with uncertainty she would have accepted, as it came, failure or success. She would have been undaunted, patient, hardworking—a pal, thought Chew.

"Die in a ditch?" she cried, and he saw that she was passionately anxious to prove that what she had missed would not have been worth while. "No, it's better to have home and children, to live like a Christian, and, in

the end, lie down with your own people and wait for the Resurrection."

"You don't think it," he answered softly, and took no notice of her instantly repeated asseveration. For once he would not spare her. She might deny the truth but she should know. In homely phrase he told of the tinkler life, shine and shade, calling winds and a refuge from the cold. What more could any one want than sky for roof and turf for carpet, the clean earth, the fresh water, and the jog, jog, jogging along the road?

"It - it isn't respectable," she told him faintly at

the end.

Chew was a walking newspaper, a sort of weekly instalment of all the human dramas being played in the neighbourhood, but of these things he did not speak to Mrs. King.

"And," she said, "there isn't only this world."

He smiled at her. "Ah — you don't think a chap like me has any chance?"

Not any chance for the man who, though he scoffed at a rooted vegetable existence, was the companion she would have chosen in that place where, fortunately, was no marrying or giving in marriage?

"I wish," she said uncomfortably, "that you were going to be buried in our graveyard. I should be

sorry -"

His thought jumped to hers. "Oh, I'll be there," he said.

II

When Harry, greased to the eyes, came in that evening he found his mother standing idly in the bow of the kitchen-window. On the table was a freshly baked pie and some turnovers. "Where's father?"

Mrs. King, recalled from dreams to the requirements of family life, went to the dresser. Harry home and the dining-room tea not laid? She took up a tray.

"Your father has gone to give Mrs. Allen a pass for one of her boys. I expect she will keep him to supper.

Why?"

"Oh, it doesn't matter," but he had aroused his mother's suspicions.

"Pay-day? You can give me the money."

He began to move away. "I always think father likes me to settle up with him."

"Hand it over."

Reluctantly the boy produced two half-crowns and pushed them across the table. His mother gave him back threepence.

"Couldn't you make it a little more? Threepence a

week is awful little."

But she had been extravagant in the matter of curtains. "It's as much as any other boy gets. I can't think what you want with so much money. What do you do with it?"

Harry envisaged and dismissed the idea that he should take her into his confidence. He wanted the money for an important plan he hoped to put into execution that evening — no less than the wheedling of old Bill Mountain, the pugilist, into giving him a boxing-lesson.

"Oh, I dunno."

"Money is the root of all evil," pursued Mrs. King, wondering how she was to explain those unnecessary curtains. "If you hadn't any you wouldn't be for ever getting into mischief." Yet if they had been better off and she had a bigger allowance she would have been able to buy as many curtains as she fancied.

Harry also thought it was the lack, not the possession, of money that led him into temptation. How often had it not driven him to extract pennies with a knife from his sisters' money-boxes? He could even remember an occasion when, having longed for uncounted days after a certain brightly coloured top, he had helped himself to the price from his mother's purse.

"Where did you get that?" she had asked as he pursued it over the floor.

"Reuben Jackets gave it to me."

But Mrs. King had seen it in a shop-window. "Don't tell me!" She had taken out her purse and counted the contents. "You bought that top! Where did you get the money?" She had been ninepence short, and that had been the price of the toy. Suddenly she had swung round. "You stole it," she had cried, and had given her son a stinging slap across the face.

The top would have been cheap at the price, but, to Harry's surprise and wrath, not only was he punished for that foraging visit to his mother's room — when he had stood under the hung-up skirt feeling for the pocket, the pocket that held the purse — but the top was taken from him. That was unjust; the whole thing was unjust. A boy ought to have enough pocket-money to get anything he wanted badly; and if the pocket-money were not forthcoming, he should not be held to account if on occasions he helped himself. What else could he do? Parents didn't understand. They were, too, so tiresomely suspicious. After the episode of the top his father had made a practice of going through Harry's pockets on a Saturday. He even called on the boy to account for his possessions!

"Jack Collins gave you this ice-cream glass? Where did he get it?"

The result when he said he had "found" a lens and a pair of folding-scissors proved as unsatisfactory. "You can't be always finding things, Henry."

And these troubles had come upon him not because he had money, but because he lacked it! He knew, too, that if he had not the wherewithal to stand Bill Mountain a can or two of beer that evening he would certainly not get the lesson he craved. "Can't you spare me another penny or two this week?"

"I shan't be able to make both ends meet as it is," and Harry, following her glance, realized that for once he and she were in like case. He laughed good-naturedly. Need of money had taught him sundry ways of procuring a few pence and he need not worry; but she was different. He wondered how she would excuse herself to the pursebearer, whether she would be able to hold her own.

"What, more curtains, mother?" he chuckled. "Whatever will father say?"

"Go and wash, Henry."

The boy crossed to the sofa. "And two pairs!"

"Don't you touch them with your dirty hands."

"I wonder you encourage old Chew."

"A fair-dealing, civil man."

"An old apple-woman!" cried Impudence. "Big fine chap like that, he ought to be a Guardsman. Really, mother, I'm surprised at you!"

"Get along with you, do." She pursued him with a teacloth. "Take that kettle of hot water and mind you

[&]quot; Dunno."

[&]quot;I don't suppose he'd more right to it than you have. You'd better ask him where it came from."

[&]quot;Oh, I can't, father."

[&]quot;Well, you aren't going to have things you can't account for."

rinse your hands properly before you dry them. No need to make the towel dirty."

She carried her tray into the dining-room and laid the cloth. If her husband accepted Mrs. Allen's ready invitation she — the poor wife who was left at home — would have to cut the ham and the bread, as well as pour out the tea. A lot for one person to do. Her glance fell on the basket of stockings. The clean clothes had been mended and put away, but the stockings remained. Such a big pile! She had washed them, and she remembered the holes and the thin places. She would have to spend the evening darning them. She would be all by herself, drawing the worsted backwards and forwards across the heels, slaving for her children and husband.

All by herself!

III

The little girls came in to their tea. A buzz of subdued conversation — for the Kings were brought up on the axiom that children should be seen and not heard — marked their entry, and Mrs. King began to cut bread and butter it. A little clash made her look up, and she saw that Harry, a scrubbed and towelled Harry, his black hair in wet rings, had come in carrying a handleless coffee-pot and an old kettle.

"Can I have these?"

She understood the request as a development of that for more pocket-money. If Harry could not get a thing one way he would try another and yet another; he would not rest till he had what he wanted. "Hold the kettle up to the light." She peered inside. "Three holes. I might get a new bottom put to it — hardly worth while. What do you want with them?"

"They are in the way, kicking about here,"

"What are you going to do with them?"

"Take them to the metal-broker."

"Very well; but come, now, and get your tea."

Harry put kettle and pot in a corner of the tiled hall. Old Gibbons paid for broken iron at the rate of a penny a pound, and there was plenty of it in the railway town. The boy thought of the black heaps at the brickfield, the banks of the canal, all the back lanes and yards and alleys that had yielded him treasure of discarded pots. Had he or had he not enough metal and — er — rags for his adventure?

"Don't bolt your tea," admonished Mrs. King.

"Didn't want to keep you waiting."

The idea of Harry keeping anybody waiting amused the mother. He was always, not exactly in a hurry, but so swift. Before you could look round he had come and he was gone — gone, too, so that you had not been aware of him as he passed. Her glance rested on him thoughtfully. "How — how fat — why, Henry!" She caught hold of his sleeve. "You've got on two coats!"

"Cold!" and Harry twitched his arm away.

"Cold? But this isn't an overcoat? You - you aren't cold."

"Well," he muttered, "it was easier to carry."

"To carry where?"

He did not answer.

"Henry!"

"It's an old coat, it's - it's ragged."

"It's your second-best."

He showed a tear of recent origin. "And the lining's gone."

"That can be mended. Take it off, sir; yes, now at once,"

"I thought it was done for; I did really."

"You were taking it to the old-clothes man."

"Well, mother, you know you like me to get rid of the rags for you."

As he dragged his arms out of the tightly fitting coat Mrs. King caught sight of a bulging pocket. Ignoring his objections, she investigated it, and produced a redand-black object, at the sight of which one of the little girls uttered a cry.

"It is the frock Auntie Bertha made for Nancy's doll."

"It was on the nursery floor."

"It's mine," said Nancy.

"I wanted to teach her to be tidy."

When Harry at last escaped it was with the feeling that his efforts for the good of the family had been sadly misconstrued. Noiselessly he picked up the broken coffeepot and kettle. So arbitrary were the ways of parents that his mother might even deprive him of these useless sherds. Hitherto she had been grateful to him for ridding her of such rubbish, but you never knew. He did not feel safe until he had handed them over to old Fred Gibbons and received the price.

IV

On his way to the "Pig and Whistle," favoured by Bill Mountain because it was the only "house" which allowed a customer to sit in the chimney corner and watch his beer being mulled, Harry reflected ruefully on the trials of home life. If it had not been for his mother's meanness with regard to old clothes, he would have had enough and more than enough for the treating of the ex-prize-fighter. He counted his pence; they would buy two

pots and that was all. Moreover, there would not be a penny left for sweets or any of the things he himself wanted. A lesson from Bill Mountain, however, would if he could persuade the man to give it - be worth more than a week's pocket-money. Slipping between the swingdoors of the tavern, his glance fell on the pugilist seated in his customary corner. Behind him rose the black wood of the settle, and against it the pale shades of his corduroys, of his greyish hair, his shaven face, showed up clearly. Bill, a clay between his lips, was ruminating over a past of which he had no reason to be ashamed when Harry, with one of his quick movements, became a part of the scene on which the man's glance was resting. Gradually he became aware of Harry, of respectful youth eager to replenish his beer-can, of youth ready to talk but too modest to venture a remark. Mountain's pale eyes, neither grey nor green but diamond-bright, twinkled acceptance of the beer, and he allowed himself to be drawn into conversation. Before long he had embarked on his most famous tale, his fight with the Waterloo Kid; and in the end Harry received the offer for which he had been angling.

Old Bill would put him up to a "wrinkle or two."

That first lesson, precursor of many, was given at the man's cottage in Cranford Lane. "The old woman's out tonight; washes for some of the people in the New Town, and Fridays she trundles it home and gets her money. We shall have the place to ourselves."

He sought the key in a window-box full of autumnal flowers, found it, threw open the door — all in a noiseless fashion which Harry, his own movements sure, could appreciate. "Wait here a moment while I turn up the light."

The cottage was not altogether in darkness, for a fire,

which had been slacked down, glimmered in the grate and from the mid-rafter of the kitchen hung a lamp. As the flame in this waxed at Mountain's touch, it revealed to Harry a room different from any he had hitherto seen, a room that in some way reminded him of ships' cabins. He glanced round, wondering why in this roomy place he should think of a cabin, and, so wondering, saw that the trifles which lie about in other houses had in this been tidied away, and that what pictures decorated the walls were not hung but pasted.

On the dresser stood a pair of scales and a basket for clean linen, but the china which should have brightened the shelves was absent. The place contained nothing that could be jarred or shaken down by heavy vibrations.

"I like light," said Mountain, pausing for a moment under the lamp, "and I like to be warm. Come on in and shut the door."

Harry, obeying him, felt his feet grit on the sanded floor. There was nothing on it over which a man might trip. The boy became aware that this room had been set forth with an end in view, and at the thought, something rose for a moment in his throat.

Mountain poked the fire into an upleap of flame, and Harry, watching him with eyes which, though respectful, were closely observant, found the quality of the room repeated in its owner. The man, though middle-aged, was light on his feet. He moved so quickly that his going baffled the eye. His assault on the dull-burning coals had been as irresistible as the blow of a Nasmyth hammer. Definite, simple, expert, he had been built, muscled, trained to one purpose, to a single end, and he had fulfilled himself.

[&]quot;Like to see my gloves?"

Harry's mere respect deepened to reverence. "Oh, I should."

With a little shining key that was warm from his pocket, Mountain opened a box which stood on a shelf under the dresser, and took therefrom a pair of well-blooded, four-ounce fighting-gloves. "These have been in many a good mill," he said, and Harry was allowed to hold them, even to draw them on his hands. He stood staring at them in a rapturous dream—at the brown leather with finger-tips cut away, backs slightly padded, and in the palm a little silk-edged ventilation-hole.

"You can fight harder with the gloves than with the bare dooks," said Mountain, looking at knuckles so big and bony that they seemed to give his assertion the lie.

"You see, it puts more body into the punch."

"I—" said Harry, quite unable to express his feelings and with that odd feeling still at the back of his throat—"I—oh!"

Mountain, rescuing the gloves, assumed an air of business. He had remembered that before long his wife would be home, and that on a Friday night she always bought something extra toothsome for supper. "There's a-many come to me to know if they'll make good fighters," said he, anxious to give the boy good measure, not so much for the beer as for his whole-hearted admiration. When you are getting long in the tooth . . . "D'yer know what I look for first?"

"I don't," said Harry, but hopefully.

Seating himself on the white sand-scoured table, Mountain put his hand under the boy's chin and tilted back the heavily boned face. "I look at the nostrils. A chap never does any good if his nostrils are pinched."

"Oh!" For all Harry knew his nose might have failed him in this important particular.

"Yours are all right," grunted the arbiter, "and your neck is short, and," he laid his hands on the boy's back and chest, "yes, you are thick." His appraising glance swept the small erect figure, divining under the clumsy clothes its promise of brawn. "I can teach you proper," he said, and, guessing at Harry's wild hopes, added a rider, "but if I do you must use your knowledge like a sport and not to cock it over other boys."

The colour came into the lad's face. "The others," said Mountain, "won't have the advantage of being primed by an old bruiser like me. Now—" and Harry noticed that, though the man sat, he was not still; also that in every movement was a suggestion, a suggestion the observer could not fathom but which kept him on the alert. "Now let us get to work. What are the four punches that will put a man to sleep?"

In his unscientific scrapping with other boys Harry had come to certain conclusions. "Well," he said shyly, "I should avoid the nose because it bleeds and then the boy blubs and people stop you."

"The nose don't matter. You soon get it broken, any way."

His indifference to facial disfigurement lifted Harry out of a world in which parents complained to other parents—his—of damage done. "I always try to bung up their eyes."

"And they don't matter either; though it's a good thing to have them set well back behind the bone—like yours. No, the four vital spots are: the point! Do you know where that is?"

Harry indicated his square and dimpled chin.

"Ay, on each side of it, about an inch up. Hit a man there and the jerk dislocates his neck! That knocks him out. To guard the point you carry your chin like this,"

He moved upon Harry, a movement the boy countered by a nimble retreat. Mountain kept him wary, kept his faculties on the stretch; yet the atmosphere of the bare room, of the talk, made him feel at home. Here he could be himself. He was entirely comfortable, and it seemed to him that the clean cottage, the simple ways, were all a man could want — all that he, Harry, would ever want. His good father, his schoolmasters, set a value on all sorts of unnecessary things, things to gain which a man had to work hard and long and distastefully. Old Bill had not thought them worth while; instead he had done the thing natural to him.

Harry's poor father was the servant of the railway and must do and go as he was bidden. In Mountain the boy sensed an attitude that was primitive and wild. The man obeyed the promptings, the incalculable promptings, of an emotional nature. How, in a world of compromise, of economic dependence, was he able to maintain his freedom? Harry answered the question in his own way: Mountain was strong.

"The other vital points," said the prize-fighter, "are the heart, the temple, and the mark. Some calls the mark," his finger rested on Harry's solar plexus, "the half-crown; it's about the size of one. It's between wind and water." He went over the information again, driving it home, amplifying it as he did so with guards, with the free movements of the left arm, the threat of the more powerful right.

"Now we can get on a bit. And to begin with, my lad, how should you stand? If a boy comes up to you and says, 'Look here, young shaver, I've had enough of your cheek and I'm going to give yer what for,' d'yer stand like this?" He drew back his head, sloping his

body from an imaginary adversary, his attitude the embodiment of fear.

Harry shook his head.

"You don't?"

"I go for him."

Mountain's scarred face relaxed. "And why shouldn't you stand like this?"

"Dunno." He knew it was the fury of his onslaught that made a fight with him dreaded by the other boys, but he could not say why he rushed the attack.

"Because," said the other, his trained muscles maintaining the awkward attitude with ease, "because in this position you are already half-way to the ground, and the first time he hits you he puts you there. No, you throw yourself forward." He was on his toes, transformed into a battering-ram. Harry felt that to be shut up with him in a room was like playing rabbit to a caged python.

"He meets you first then, with all your weight behind it."

The boy nodded, but kept a space of sanded floor between himself and his redoubtable teacher.

"If you stand like this"—he was thrown forward, bony head first, fists moving, heavy body behind—"the other chap has to lift you up and push you back; both, before he can knock you down. See?"

" I see."

"We'll have a go to find out what you can do. Take off your coat." He shed his own, laying it with tie and collar on the table, then put a belt about his middle. A thirteen-stone man, his chest muscles stood out in massive curves above a twenty-five-inch waist.

"My word," said Harry, opening his eyes, "but you are a man!"

Though old Bill pretended not to hear, he was enjoying his evening. Fighting was his craft and to impart the rudiments of it a pleasure. As he tightened the belt about his trousers he continued to talk. "There's the arm-blow, now, and that won't hurt a man, nohow. You? Ah, but you are soft. The man isn't living who can hurt me with an arm-blow; the most he could do would be to punch my nose and make it bleed, but that don't hurt."

Though Harry came of a hard and vigorous family, not one of them could take punishment in this primitive fashion. "It's the body behind the blow," explained the boxer, "that gives the power, the strength of the body from the waist up. Well—now then."

He moved on Harry, and Harry, seeing him as incarnate strength, as a will concentrated on his destruction, yet accepted the challenge. In his throat was that queer thrill, nearly a sob but not quite. The shallow hopes and observations of his individual life had begun to fade; something deeper was answering Mountain's call, responding to the menace with one younger, less terrible perhaps, but as fierce.

"Now then, let out with your left, don't come teetering up like an old gal. Come on now, come on. Your left; that's it."

Harry, moving quickly round and over the lamplit kitchen, answered to the stimulus of the exciting phrases with an earnest collection of himself into one aspect which yet was not himself but the weapon of some unknown and greater force. Mountain, slapping him lightly with the open hand, sent him reeling, a catch in his breath, against the table, against the dresser. He fell back before those lightning slaps, but only to come on again, and his face, for all its soft boyish contours, was as set as that of the man.

"Now then, come on, hit out; come on then. Fight — fight —"

Harry was no longer an individual, he was part of a whole, subservient to the swell of emotion that was directing him, one wave of a mighty sea. The insistent voice, hard and fierce, brought him racing on to the shore.

"Fight, will you? Fight!"

And what was the shore but a destroying force?

"Come on now, fight."

With the fingers of the large hand set straight and close, the boxer touched Harry wherever he would. He drove the boy about until he had taken the last ounce of his strength, till Harry fell against the matchboard of the kitchen cupboard and lay there, sobbing.

"You'll do!" grunted Mountain, pulling him to his

feet.

His head under the cold-water tap in the back kitchen, his sobs dying away, Harry came to his normal self. The queer emotion had sunk into the depths of his being. For a moment he had been out of himself, but now he was once more Harry King.

And the said Harry had had a wonderful evening. He

had stood up to a real fighting-man!

He hardly realized, so full of himself was he, that Mrs. Mountain was come back.

"Chitterlings," cried she on a note of triumph, and when Harry said good night to his mentor he saw that Mountain's face wore a look of happy anticipation.

"'Ope you're 'ungry, Bill?"

"Well, old woman, I could do with a bit," and the cottage door shut on their mutual content.

V

When Harry reached home St. Luke's clock was striking ten. He judged it advisable, therefore, to go in by the back door, was indeed relieved to find it on the latch. Leaving his boots in the scullery, he walked with careful lightness across the hall. If he could get upstairs unseen all would be well.

A light shone from the half-open dining-room door and he could hear the voices of his parents. The stairs went up abruptly from this door, and Harry paused for a moment on the mat at the foot. He had caught a phrase that interested him.

"Well, you see, they were such a bargain."

"Yes, but, my dear," expostulated his father, "you didn't want them."

"I don't know about that. I've none too many."

"The man is a regular nuisance. He takes good care not to come when I'm at home."

"You weren't at home, certainly," said Mrs. King, and Harry noticed, without understanding it, a peculiar inflexion in her voice, "you had just gone up the road."

His father responded as if suddenly put on his defence. "I'd got the pass and I didn't like to keep them waiting for it."

"No, you make the fatherless and the widow your first care. Well, I think it's time for bed."

And the scrape of her chair sent Harry flying up the stairs.

If there was one thing Harry disliked it was having to render an account of his comings and goings. He began to eat his dinner as if pressed for time. "I was having a lesson."

On the opposite side of the table, the three little sisters pricked up their ears. Harry studious was a Harry unknown to them.

"What sort of a lesson?" asked Mr. King.

"A lesson in boxing!"

The father's face relaxed. "Who was your teacher?"

"A man named Mountain." He gave the name with confidence; it would not awaken echoes in these innocent minds.

Mr. King remembered that one of the teachers in the Sunday-school had spoken to him of the value of physical exercise. He had never had any use for it himself, but he perceived that it might help to keep the demon of youthful sensuality in check. Could the man's name have been Mountain?

"Does he teach in St. Luke's Sunday School?"

Harry thought it unlikely.

"How did you come across him?"

"A chap told me this other chap could box, so I went and saw him about it."

On the whole, this venture met with Mr. King's approval. "The boys at the works are a rough lot . . ." he began thoughtfully.

115

To Harry the roughness of his fellow-apprentices was of no moment; what he could not stomach was their dirt—dirty minds in dirty bodies, dirty talk—he could not stand it! He would go elsewhere for his associates; and his thoughts flew to the evening company at the "George," where the bar was presided over by handsome Polly Martin. The talk there was of horses and dogs, and, comparatively speaking, it was clean.

"And it is perhaps as well you should know how to

stand up for yourself," concluded Mr. King.

"What about turning the other cheek?" asked Mrs. King.

"Well—er—" the father smiled over the vision she had conjured up, the vision of Harry turning that cheek, "it might be misunderstood."

"The meek shall inherit the earth."

"True, my dear, but is it worth inheriting?"

She stared at him in surprise. In the chapel she attended no one commented on, much less questioned, a pious utterance. "It was a reward."

"We are not told so, and it's my humble belief that by the meek was meant the farm-labourer. He certainly inherits the earth, but I've never thought he made a good thing of it."

Invigorated by the little connubial brush, he turned to Harry. "You know I don't approve of fighting for fight-

ing's sake."

The lad, filling his recurrent emptiness with cold beef and boiled potatoes, pondered the remark. Mountain, the clean man in the clean cottage, had fought for fighting's sake, because it came natural to him to fight, because he had a fierce instinctive joy in the giving — ay, and the receiving — of a blow, and, as Harry felt, because fighting was for him the work he had been put here to do. His

father had never fought; how could he understand? "Why don't you approve?"

The dogged question took Mr. King by surprise. "Oh — er — because it's wrong."

" Why?"

A boy should not question those in authority. Mr. King felt uneasily that Harry, even Harry, was growing up. Very soon only the little girls would be left.

"Well - it's brutalizing."

The final word had been spoken. Prize-fighting was a brutal sport, on a level with bull-baiting and other early English pastimes. He was surprised to annoyance when Harry, with an air of wanting to know, said, "How?"

A note of asperity crept into Mr. King's voice. Though such a big lad, the questioner was not yet of an age to think for himself. "Prize-fighters," he said, "are a drinking, betting, pot-hunting, low lot. And that is enough about it. When I say a thing, Henry, you shouldn't question. I've had experience and I know."

Harry considered this. "But I can't know just because you have had experience. I've got to find out for myself."

"When you are older, when you are a man. Meanwhile, you can take it from me that prize-fighting degrades and brutalizes."

And Harry thought of Mountain.

He thought, also, of a conversation he had that morning overheard. His foreman was talking to another man and he was supposed to be too busy to heed. The men had said his father was stupid and narrow-minded, that he had a "wonderful" boy, a boy who was going to do something, but who was "kept down." They had glanced at Harry, at work on a nut-lathe, and spoken of his football. "Mark my words," his foreman had said, "we

shall see that lad an International." A murmur from the other man, and then the foreman said: "He was put into our best team this season and I hear he's shaping extraordinarily well. I'm going down this afternoon to see for myself. Pity his guv'nor . . ."

That was how other men felt and thought about it. Harry glanced at the clock. He was in his shorts, had only to get the tasselled cap he wore with so much pride.

"Have you chopped the wood, Henry?"

"Yes, mother."

"Brought in the coal?"

"I have."

She nodded, and her son, setting back his chair, went out like an engine starting off at full throttle. At the door, however, he was intercepted by his sister Bet.

"Be back early, Bear."

" Why?"

"We're going to the party tonight — Susie Allen's birthday-party."

"Good," he said, pleased with the prospect. "Will there be dancing?"

"I expect so."

He did a polka down the hall, and for the moment his mind was distracted from football by the vision of Susie Allen, the little girl he had so often seen returning to her home from school. She wore her fair, glossy hair in short, thick curls and she had peculiarly soft eyes. The eyes had looked at him thoughtfully, at this big boy coming from the works in the Old Town and, though dirty, with a something about him which made him not easily forgotten. And Harry had been intrigued by the curls. They were so different from his sisters' tumbling manes. He wanted to see them close, to touch their smoothness

with a tentative finger. It seemed to him unreal. He would not be content until he knew.

II

Once in the street, his pace quickened. His Saturday afternoon walk to the football field was a play he was wont to stage-manage with considerable care, and he was afraid lest he should be late. By back lanes and alleys he hurried to the head of the main thoroughfare, and, once there, ran up a flight of steps which, ostensibly leading to a bank, was for him a watch-tower. He was on the look-out for certain people, Great Ones, who would come this way. First he glanced down the street to see if they had passed, then up to see if they were coming. In that crowd of released workers, that jabble of people glad, after the week's confinement, to be free and in the open, it needed both quick and clear sight to distinguish particular faces. Harry studied the people intently, and at length caught sight of the men for whom he was waiting, crossing from the stopping-place of the trams.

He intended to walk before them down the street, to draw their attention to himself and listen to what was said. It was nuts to Harry to hear men discussing him. He would play all the better for the knowledge of their faith in him. He had done well, but he would do better. A chance, an opportunity, and they should see.

Returning lightly to the pavement, he waited until the Great Ones were on his heels, then, adapting his pace to theirs strolled ahead. For some time his short, thick, stubby figure, forging its casual way through the shifting groups of people, failed to win remark; but in the end, a wandering eye fell on the thick, shapely calves, fell with recognition. The interest of the expert quickened. He turned to the man with whom he was walking.

"Why, there's the Rough 'Un."

"Not that little chap?"

"Little? Anyway, he's our Champion Chucker."

"You catch 'em young."

"Wait till you see him pinch the ball and shove it to the three-quarters. Young 'uns are the nippiest; this one's a miracle." The voice grew confidential. "Man over from the Rangers last week — noticed the Rough 'Un's play . . ."

"I bet Fiander don't want the Rangers snoopin' round

after his men."

"Ay, Fiander could ha' done wi'out him."

Harry had warmed to the word "miracle," but what was this about the Rangers? The heat of his internal combustion engine went up several degrees. The Rangers were an important team, in quite a different class from the one for which he played. Was it possible they would ever ask him to play for them? He wondered if a Ranger were likely to be among the onlookers that afternoon. If so — and Harry clenched himself on a resolution to do his best and more than his best!

He was put to mark the biggest man in the opposing team; and the man was inclined to be contemptuous of him as a youngster not yet come into his strength. The contempt lasted until, for the first time, the stranger's two hands touched the ball. In a trice the Rough 'Un had collared him round the knees, was pulling him forward. The big man buckled and, a ludicrous expression of amazement on his face, came down. A roar of delighted approval went up from the crowd. Such a little chap and so spunky! Harry heard his name shouted in that great blended voice — not his baptismal name, but the

one popularity had found him. "Go it, Rough 'Un, go it!" and he wondered again whether a Ranger were looking on.

Bet met the muddy object that returned in triumph from the football field with an anxious adjuration to be quick.

"We won, Bet - four goals to nothing."

"Oh, Bear, we are so late, we ought to be there by now. Let me come and help you change?"

He surveyed the muslin frock and blue sash a little dubiously. "The others ready?"

"We've been ready a long time."

"My things out?"

"I've put them on your bed."

"All right, then, I won't be half a tick. And I say, Bet . . ."

" Yes?"

"I'm hungry. I don't believe I had much dinner."

"Yes, you did; I saw."

"Anyway . . ."

"They give us a scrumptious tea there."

The thought of a candle-lit table with coloured cakes and jellies, perhaps even crackers, made his mouth water. Already the football was forgotten. "Still . . ."

"I'll see what I can do," and presently she came running up the stairs with a big hunch of cake.

"Are you ready, Bear?"

"Pretty near. I say, Bet, you are a bit of all right." She looked down at her frock. "It's new. We've all got new muslin frocks and they're to do us for the dancing-class. Nancy has a pink sash and Mab's is green."

"Why do you tie your curls in a bunch?"

She patted the big blue bow on her neck approvingly. "It's the fashion."

"Oh!" and though he could not deny that "the fashion" suited Bet's open face, he knew a way of hair-dressing that was prettier far. "Come on, now. I'm ready."

Ш

The three little girls, convoyed by a spruce brother, hurried down the road. They did not want to be late for the birthday-tea, for the cake which the pastrycook had iced and on the white sugar of which would be written Susie's name in pink letters and the date of her birth. Several little families had gone past and they, waiting in the dining-room while Harry dressed, had seen them go. Not until they were safely under Mrs. Allen's roof was their anxiety allayed.

"Now that we are all here," she said — and they loved her for her patience, and also for so quickly inaugurating the joys of the party —"I think we will have tea."

On each child's plate was a pink card with its name, and down the centre of the laden table was an abundance of crackers. Mrs. Allen had an intuitive knowledge of the food young people preferred. She wanted Susie to enjoy her birthday — to gain, too, a little experience, so that when her turn came she might be able to give successful parties. Therefore she had said, "To begin with, darling, we'll have tea; it breaks the ice."

"And then, mums?"

"Then a lively, stirring sort of game; it makes people friendly."

After tea, therefore, Auntie Maud went to the piano and they played musical chairs. Harry, with the energy football had depleted restored by food—and such delicious food—found himself running round a diminishing row of seats with his attention divided between a little girl

in front — a little girl whose hair, parted on a neat small head, hung in large glossy curls — and the need to keep an ever-changing chair in view. The little girl's dress was in a peculiar way different from that of other little girls. It was of white satin. Yes, the satin was certainly white, yet in the folds and as she moved it glowed as if the slim body underneath was a flame and was shining through. This rosy glow at once pleased and puzzled him; it drew his curious glance, so that he looked at her all the time they were running and sitting down and running again. At last there was only one chair and they were running round it, but by then Harry's attention was so much taken up with the mystery of the frock that when, the music stopped for the last time it was the little girl who was sitting on the solitary chair and not he.

He did not mind being beaten by her, for as she sat down she lifted her skirt a little and he saw that, under the white satin, she was wearing a petticoat of flame-coloured brocade. Never had he imagined such a petticoat! He had seen his mother's, drab and workaday; the little plain underskirts, white or coloured according to the season, that his sisters wore. He had not known there was in the world such a petticoat as this which was flaming through the frock designed to hide it. When he had left home he had been well pleased with Bet's muslin frock; he now regarded it no more than the rags he was wont to carry to the old-clothes man.

IV

When the young people had been warmed out of their shyness by the hearty give-and-take of games Auntie Maud began a polka.

"Darling," and Mrs. Allen laid a detaining hand

on her daughter's arm, "where are you going?"

"To get a partner."

"But little girls don't ask little boys."

"Then," she raised troubled eyes to her mother's face, how do you get a partner?"

"If you wait quietly, a boy will come."

"Oh, but," said Susie, "I don't want any boy."

"No, but still, you mustn't do the asking."

Susie considered this until mother-wit showed her a way out of the difficulty. She walked deliberately into the middle of the room and stood under the twinkling lustres of the great glass chandelier. If she might not make the advances, at least she would be seen. To her it seemed of the utmost importance that she should not be overlooked, and, standing in the blaze of light, she lifted her soft blue eyes and looked across the room.

She had no need to do more. Harry, without seeming to do so, had been watching the little head set round with curls, the figure in that glowing frock. He had seen her leave her mother's side. He waited until she paused under the chandelier, then a spirit in his feet brought him across to her. Neither spoke to the other, but he put an arm round her waist and they began to dance.

"So that was the boy," said Mrs. Allen to herself. "Well, yes. . . ."

Their faces as they swung past were grave and they seemed more occupied with the dance than with each other, for neither said a word. They danced until the music stopped, then Harry brought his partner to a seat and left her.

"Well?" said Mrs. Allen again, and smiled.

"When a boy wants a partner," said Susie, who had been meditating on her mother's convention, "he looks about him." "Yes?" said Mrs. Allen.

"And you try to be where he is looking."

When the dancing recommenced Harry came to her at once. Other boys had determined to ask her for a dance but he shouldered them aside, and she took his doing so as a matter of course.

"Yes," said the mother to herself.

The boy and girl danced every dance together. They were absorbed and quite remarkably silent. Mrs. Allen, watching, did not see them exchange a single word, and when Mr. King fetched his flock they parted without so much as a handshake.

A quadrille was being started, and Bertie Nockolds, the son of a local doctor, thought his chance was come.

"No, thank you," said Susie sedately, "I don't want to dance this," and out of the tail of her eye Mrs. Allen, as she arranged the sets, saw her daughter go to the window and, lifting the corner of the blind, peer into the night.

"Too dark," she thought, but the young things knew better.

Harry had fallen behind father and sisters and was looking back. He felt that a satisfaction, a last sweetness, was awaiting him, and saw without surprise the lifted blind, the beam of light, the outline of a little head. The street-lamp made him darkly visible. He raised his arm in a gesture of farewell, his gesture and for her only.

The evening was at an end, their evening; but he knew now the reality of those silky curls. He had touched them surreptitiously, touched them when she was not noticing, and he knew.

Susie had not been noticing, of course, but — she also knew!

Chapter IX

I

EGAN ROBERTS stood at the window of her attic yawning. The Clarkes, to whom she had lately come as mother's help, were out for the day, and she could not see why, if they were enjoying themselves, she should work.

On her left stretched the garden — two plots where other houses were built on one — of Mr. King. A sound of splashing came from the neighbourhood of the scullery-door but Megan heard it with indifference. In all probability Mrs. King, whom she knew by sight, was washing down the yard; and the girl could imagine the shallow scurry of dirty water as it was pushed by a hard brown broom towards the open drain. She did not turn her head.

Away went Polly,
With a step so jolly
That I knew she'd win

sang a voice which she recognized, with a start, as masculine and young. A tap was running, but above the gurgle of water rose the blithe, resonant tones, the words clear as if spoken in her ear:

All the rest were licked and might
As well ha' ne'er been born.
Whoa, mare! Whoa, mare! You've earned
Your little bit of corn.

Megan ran over in her mind the next-door household. As far as she knew, it consisted of some bright, vigorouslooking girls, a bustling mother, and a handsome middleaged man. Harry, who was at the works by six and who spent his evenings in town, she had not yet seen. Could the singer be Mr. King? She crossed to the other side of the window and looked down. From where she stood she had a good view of the yard into which the scullery door opened, of its capsized pails sweetening in the sun, the lumber of barrels and washing-trough, and, under the window, the broad bench. As she glanced over it inquiringly, a youth came through the doorway carrying a pitcher of water - a youth who was naked to the waist and who carried the heavy vessel as if it had been empty. Harry was seventeen. He was coming into his strength, and as the girl's glance fell on his wide shoulders and the square, yet rounded barrel of his chest her pulse quickened. Never had she seen anything so, to her mind, beautiful. The big chest fell away to a small waist, and under the loosely girt trousers she guessed at brawny curves that matched the big and shining arms. In a trice all who had previously caught her fancy grew shadowy. Harry, still singing, poured water into a basin and began to wash off the grime - not apparent to the onlooker overhead - of the works. His head was pleasantly full of his own concerns. As captain of the local cricket team he had embarked on a successful season. The previous Saturday he had made a hundred and forty-five not out, and he hoped to do better at the match they were playing with the Sissiter eleven a fortnight hence. He thought of his team. Ward was a good bowler but he pitched his balls too short. The best plan would be to mark the blind spot and make him practise. He, Harry, must see about it.

On his bare back beat a sudden shower, and for a moment he wondered whether, in spite of the sunshine and cloudless sky, rain could be falling. The shower appearing, however, to be limited to a small area, he looked about till he caught sight of a head above the wall, a head with michievous eyes and strange hair. He had never seen such hair; it was like new copper wire.

"Hullo!" he said, picking up the towel, "what are

you doing?"

"Only watering the flowers." As she spoke she dropped the nozzle of the hose, and it spurted harmlessly along the gravel-path on which she was standing.

Harry thought that he liked the look of her. That hair and creamy skin and long narrow, red-brown eyes —

but were they red-brown?

"You aren't a Clarke?" They were dull chaps, the Clarkes, could not play games for toffee. He had no use for them. "What are you doing here?"

"I'm helping Mrs. Clarke. There were too many of us at home and it's quiet at Lwm-crwn. But I find it is

quiet here too, though this is a town."

Harry thought he had never heard such a pretty voice; he wanted to imitate its rise and fall. "There are the Clarkes," he said, instinct teaching him why such an one found the place dull. "Albert . . ."

"Albert!" She gave him a sidelong glance, and again he wondered whether the eyes were wholly brown. "I

prefer the boy on the other side!"

"Old Rube?"

"And not him, either. I do not like everybody; indeed and indeed I do not, so I am lonely."

Harry registered the fact that the voice rose at the end of a sentence. As soon as he was alone he would repeat the phrases with her intonation. "Poor little

girl," he said, but absently. He was saying over to himself "lonely." He was giving the word a little treble lilt.

"They are all out. They've driven over to Mr. Endicott's farm to make hay and pick strawberries. They've left me behind."

"What a shame!" It was just like the Clarkes, the sort of thing they would do. The idea of having a girl like this in the house and leaving her out of things! Harry waxed indignant. "The Clarkes think of nobody but themselves."

"It would not have hurt them to have taken me."

He saw her lip trembling, perceived that she was disappointed. He had a vision of Albert sitting beside her in the wagonette, tossing hay over her, able, by looking deep into those troubling eyes, to discover — what was it he had wanted to discover? He drew a step nearer, the towel held to his chin, his shoulders gleaming satin-white above it. But the sun was in his face, he could not see.

"I hate being there," she made a gesture towards the house, "by myself. The rooms are dark." She shivered as if their gloom were uncanny, and as she moved, the sun glittered in her coppery hair. "I'd gone upstairs to get away from things." She pointed to her window, and he saw the attic through her eyes as a haven. "Then"—she was no longer piteous—"I saw you."

II

"Henry!" cried a voice from the interior of the house, and, as if the sound had been a danger-signal, the red head sank out of sight. Harry was putting the towel to its legitimate use when the voice embodied itself in Mrs. King.

"Who were you talking to?"

"One of the Clarkes."

She had caught a glimpse of sun-fired hair, and, the Clarkes being mud-coloured, she wondered a little and doubted. "Your father wants you. He's had a letter."

"Where is he?" The Kings having but few correspondents, every square envelope that came to the house was regarded by youth with curiosity, with hope. Harry turned. Already the wash of a new interest was sweeping over his mind, dimming that impression of a full throat, of dazzling hair. She was by no means the first who had spoken to him, but he did not care about girls. Not? Well, then, yes, he did; after all, a fellow was a man. But he wanted more than just—that; something different. He would find it too—some day. For the moment he was too busy to go and look for it. He would content himself with what came; but, later . . .

"Your father has gone upstairs to wash his hands." The children, the whole family, knew that Mr. King lived a little private life of his own, called "washing his hands." It was connected with the big green safe which stood by the bed in his room, and which was kept locked. Whenever money was unexpectedly required Mr. King would go upstairs, he would rub his pale hands one over the other as if drying them, and when he returned he would have the necessary sum in his pocket. At other times, when he had half an hour to spare, he would disappear. The key would be turned in the bedroom-lock and silence would reign. The family could not believe that it was the silence of inactivity; they imagined him mysteriously busy with the contents of the safe. Richard, whose mind had been influenced by books of adventure, thought of his father as weighing out ounces of gold-dust and gloating over precious stones; the Codger suspected

him of collecting something, perhaps beetles; while Harry fancied the safe must contain the insignia of some secret society, a society like the one to which he belonged, but more mysterious. To all the children the safe was a mystery-box which they would have liked to investigate, but Harry was the only one who had tried to discover where his father kept the key.

III

In response to the boy's knock Mr. King came to the bedroom door. "What do you want?"

" Mother sent me up."

"Oh, ah, yes." He stood back, and Harry, entering, sent a quick glance round the room. To his surprise, the door of the safe was ajar; so also was the door of a little corner bracket, which contained a few medicines such as castor-oil, Gregory's powder, Beecham's Pills.

"I've never gone through that cupboard properly," thought Harry, and resolved to repair the omission.

"Just met Archdeacon Margerison; in fact—" his smile was one of boyish gratification, "in fact, he walked home with me." Harry, perceiving that the family had received its due, warmed to the Archdeacon. People in high places were not always so discriminating. "He was speaking of you."

Alarming that, but he had been confirmed. Surely there was nothing more they — the parsons — could do to him?

"He is short of Sunday-school teachers. He asked what you did with yourself of a Sunday afternoon."

"I go for a walk."

"It's only an hour out of the afternoon."

"But it's the only afternoon I have."

Mr. King, strolling across the room, pushed the gilt knob of the safe, and the door shut with a metallic clang and snap. "He wants you to take the big boys' class; they've got rather out of hand."

Harry, less certain that he required the whole of Sunday afternoon for his own purposes, was still cautious.

"Where is it held?"

"In the little classroom at the schools. They have it to themselves."

Which, being interpreted, meant that he would have it and them to himself. In those circumstances, to take the big boys might prove amusing.

"Windle used to teach them, but last Sunday they

locked him out, so he has thrown up the job."

Roseate hues began to play over the Archdeacon's request. Take the big boys' class? Harry thought he might.

"What time ought I to be there?"

"Three o'clock."

"Well — I don't mind." He was turning away when he remembered that his mother had spoken of a letter. "Anything else?"

Mr. King turned the key in the oiled lock of the safe, and Harry saw that it bore a tin label, forked at the end. He would know it again.

"Yes," said the older man, and his tone was businesslike, "I've heard from the naval authorities."

Harry gaped on him in sudden throbbing joy, the rush of feeling so strong that he could hardly articulate. "You have heard?"

"You are to go to Bristol for the physical examina-

"When?"

"Tuesday week,"

Mr. King went into details. "You can stay the night with your Uncle Robert. People tell me there's no doubt of your getting in if you can pass the physical examination."

"And I'm pretty strong." He dwelt with satisfaction on his swelling muscles. The Ramblers had asked him to play for them next season; he was Captain of the Parkside Cricket Club; captain, too, of the "Gym." No doubt about his strength! Old Liddicoat, the cost-price man, had said there wasn't a fellow in the place could stand up to him, and it was true. The new chaps boxed with him, but not the old; they knew. Of late he had been swinging locomotive-engine brake-blocks from his teeth, and that took some doing. Strong? He hadn't his match.

"I know, but they are mighty particular." Harry heard the doubt. Doubt? Doubt of his strength? Why should his father seek to belittle it? Though no good at books, he was a right engineer. The great Mr. Steel, the works manager, who had once seen him sparring, had called him the "Pocket Hercules." As good as a certificate, that. There could not be — surely there could not be any doubt?

"Well, it's tea-time." Harry woke to the fact that his father was fidgeting about the room, waiting for him to go, waiting to slip the key of the safe into its hiding-place.

Tea might be on the table, but the hunger of which towards meal-time he was healthily conscious had deserted him. He ran up to his room. Before he faced the family he must get the first exuberance of his joy and excitement under control. An engineer in the Navy! He loved the sea, the cold, relentless sea; loved to see a good ship plunging through heavy seas, loved the warm engine-

room. If he could have these things and the one thing more: if he were chosen, chosen to serve!

His country! A something big, vague, immensely important—a something worthy of him, of the utmost he could give!

His eyes were full of tears, his chest heaving with emotion. "England!" he said to himself, and walked up and down the room. One little body could not contain so vast a flood of feeling; he must do something to work it off. Food? He was beyond the need of food. He was going to serve his country; he was going to fight for her, to fight all in, to give all he had!

He ran lightly down the stairs, tiptoed past the dining-room door — for he could not face the family yet — and let himself out of the house. For the last few months he had hired a room at the "George," a room in which he could box. Thither came the hardiest of the apprentices. They came once and Harry gave them of his best; it was not often that they came again. Only a few, young and earnest, were willing to go on. Old Mountain came, gave terse advice, put them up to wrinkles, treated a new-comer to a few pats and a dab on the nose, and criticized Harry's performances. One or two sporting men turned up, not as a regular thing but on occasion. The horsy, doggy frequenters of the saloon bar said Harry was "a stiff little chap and would go far." He thought they treated him as one of themselves. . . .

"I want to hurt some one," he said, turning on the bar a face of entreaty.

A man named Mallet laughed. "I'm not on tonight but I saw Mountain go by just now. He had a likely lad in tow. Go and plug him."

Polly Martin, handsome Polly Martin, who had long

since recognized in Harry a humble lover, shed him a kindly glance.

"What's the matter with you tonight?"

"Oh, it's a good old world."

"Don't let them maul you about."

"I'll do the mauling."

But when, an hour later, he looked into the room where the men were playing Crown and Anchor, one of his eyes was what is known as "black." He seemed satisfied, however, and at peace; and when Polly spoke of remedies, only grinned with "A bat between the eyes? What's that to an admiral of the Fleet?"

Happily conscious of having let off steam, he sauntered up to the group of men about the Crown and Anchor board. Mallet, whose status at the "George" he did not quite understand, was in charge and was enlivening the proceedings with a flow of patter.

Harry at seventeen was earning fifteen shillings a week, and although of this twelve-and-six went to his father, he had ways of adding to his income. A shilling was burning in his trousers pocket and the game was often kind to him. He would order a schooner of beer and with the rest of the money would have a go.

"Come on, my lucky lads!" cried Mallet, rattling the dice. "Who says a punt on this lucky old board? Come here in wheelbarrows, go away in your own gigs. Can't I talk some of you into money? You pick 'em and we'll pay 'em; the old man's got the stuff. A shilling on the hook, eh? Now, who says a bit of snow on the four corners? There's four aces going for the old man. Two shillings half-way is a good bit. Split that two bob—a shilling on the die and club. What about a little snow on the spade and heart? Who says a little punt on the

old shovel? Come on, my lucky lads, stack it on thick and heavy. There's the heart running for the old man. Nobody say a little punt on the old jam tart? Any more before we lift her? Are you all set?" He paused and looked round. Harry had staked with the rest. Forgetting the schooner of beer, he had staked his shilling.

"Then up she comes?"

With an eager movement they closed about the board. "There's the name and the game and the die; the crown, hook, and die — just where the stinking stuff lies. Paid there five bob, paid there. All paid, well paid, and away she goes again. If you don't like our shake you can shake her yourselves."

Harry had been lucky. Conscious now of hunger, he was able to order some bread and cheese and, yes, the delayed schooner of beer. His father prided himself on never having tasted alcohol. He often spoke of it to a family he imagined admiring and hoped to influence. But Harry saw no merit in abstention. Better, surely, to try a thing for oneself. Therefore, on this day of opening prospects he ordered beer.

It was not the first time he had taken it. The cool dark brown liquid, bubbling in the long glass, looked attractive but was not altogether to his taste. That night, however, he was both hungry and thirsty.

IV

He ate and drank to the squeaking of a merry fiddle played in the street and, after paying his score, sauntered out. For all he had lived a crowded hour, the evening was not far advanced. Harry watched the children footing it to the blind man's tune. A year or two earlier and he would have joined them. Even now he looked at them enviously; but an engineer in the Navy - no. He turned to go home, and, instinctively, he chose a roundabout way. Home meant a little woolly talk and then bed; but why bed when the sunset sky was glorious with colour? He would go by way of the canal, and perhaps the adventure he never sought but so frequently found would be awaiting him on its green banks. Others were of like mind, and the towing-path was populous with youth. Harry took the glances directed at him by passing maidens with a non-committal eye. He saw other lads of his age chaffing the girls, strolling with them, sitting in the dusk of the trees with an arm about a trim waist, and he was envious but a little shy. It seemed to him that every girl was pretty, the colours she wore a jov after masculine blacks and grevs and browns, the glimpses of her twinkling ankles under discreet skirts a most thrilling matter. He wanted to answer those provocative glances, he was agog to answer them, yet did not quite dare. He walked by the groups, therefore, and the girls looked after him longingly; but they also were, thrillingly, a little shy.

The sky was reflected, blue and gold and crimson, on the murky water; a brightly painted barge broke through the mirrored lights, and Harry, absently watching the gay disturbance, thought it a dull show. He had come to a lonely stretch of the canal, and to the right of him lay brickfields, the torn earth, the lines of newly burnt bricks, the round, strongly odorous kiln. He sniffed in the smell appreciatively. That was good, a rough scent and a clean.

"Hullo, darling!"

Not a soul in sight! No one but their two selves, and Gipsy Sal had the full figure that he admired. He saw a girl not much older than himself and pretty, with a

high colour and big smiling eyes. Instantly he felt at home with her, felt a pleasant thrill of anticipation; but he must show her that he was a man, that he knew the right thing to say.

"What's the price tonight?"

"What you can afford, dear." She drew a step nearer and the quality of her smile changed. She had something to sell and she would make the best price she could. Her full breast was almost touching Harry, her full lips were pouting up at him. It was her moment and she must get what she could. "Come, brass up, my lad," she said heavily, "brass up."

Harry drew away. "You can have what I've got," he said, and handed her his remaining pieces of silver, "but I don't want . . ."

He would not buy what he felt, suddenly and convincingly, must be a gift. He could not buy it. His body revolted from her, from her lure, her easiness, her promiscuity. He had something to learn, but not from her.

"Thank you, dearie," she said, and slipped the money into the safest place she knew, her stocking.

"Isn't it a pretty poor trade?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Depends on the chaps, but when they're free-handed and there's plenty of lush I don't want nothing better."

"Don't you? I should have thought a fine woman like you would have wanted a fellow to work for her and a home of her own."

"I don't see myself a slommocky drab drudging from morning till night for some—" and she swore. "No thanks, not for this child."

" But . . ."

[&]quot;I say, what's the gime?" As he had given her what

he had in his pocket, she realized that his intentions were friendly. "You're soft, ain't you?"

"I'm thinking of you."

"I - never!"

"I want you to chuck it."

She burst into a loud laugh. "Hi, Bill!" she cried, and a big man emerged from the shadow of the bricks. "There's a chap 'ere what's barmy."

The big man loomed up between them but Harry stood his ground. "Been h'insultin' of you? Holy Moses! Why, it's the Rough 'Un!" His truculence vanished. "Run along 'ome, kiddie. I ain't goin' to try and cut the bleedin' 'eart out of you."

He took the woman by the arm and they went up the tow-path. The sound of their rough laughter came back to Harry. Had he made a fool of himself? He stood for some moments nonplussed and wondering, but gradually his confidence returned. Conduct such as Gipsy Sal's brought women to drink and to the growing horrors of the descent into hell. Not his business, perhaps, to utter a warning, but some one - he thought vaguely of Archdeacon Margerison, his father, the Lord God - ought. How otherwise were people to know? At any rate, he had spoken out; perhaps he had been meant to. Perhaps that was why he had had strength to resist temptation. Dwelling on the look in Gipsy Sal's fine eyes, he realized that the temptation had been strong. A raw boy, inexperienced, he had yet been able to resist. He went home satisfied with, even elated by, his evening.

V

"Indoors by ten," was the rule of No. 14 Parkside, and Harry was half an hour late. He was too well

pleased with himself, however, to be cautious. As he came into the dining-room Mr. King looked up from the ledger he was auditing.

"James went upstairs half an hour ago," he said

pointedly.

The character of the household had known a change. Bet was at boarding-school and James, having left Cheeley, had gone into the works. He was nineteen — a slow, studious lad whose engineering designs were beginning to attract notice. As a room-mate Harry found him as lively as a snail in a cranny.

Mrs. King folded the nightdress she had been mending.

"Where have you been?"

"For a walk."

"At this time of night! Where?"

"By the canal."

" Alone?"

"I met people I knew." Harry had a whimsical picture of Gipsy Sal in his mother's house.

Mrs. King got up, intending to lay the folded work with other garments; but as she passed Harry she stopped

abruptly. "You've been drinking."

"Drinking?" Harry had been annoyed by his mother's questions. His brows came together in an obtuse angle — a sign, with him, of anger; but though Mrs. King saw, she did not care. The boy's breath smelt, and she would not have it. A fine thing for a son of hers to come home from some low pot-house and lie to her about walks!

"I've had a can of beer. No harm in that."

Mr. King closed the ledger with a slam. He was not angry, but the cover had slipped from his uncertain fingers. No, not angry, only troubled. Harry was scarcely seventeen and already, in spite of precept and

example, was beginning to drink. The father felt his authority waning.

"Look here, my lad, I can't have it; we're tectotallers here."

"I don't see why I should be a teetotaller because you are."

His mother broke in. "You begin with one glass and get a liking for the stuff, and the liking grows till you can't do without it. Drink is the curse of the country."

"It isn't necessary to take too much."

"People always do. You may think you are strong, Henry, but you will find drink is the stronger. Where did you buy this beer?"

"At the 'George,' " said Harry sullenly.

"And how did you get that black eye?"

"Boxing."

"So that is how you spent your evening? And you told us you had been for a walk. A pretty walk — brawling in a pub."

"Once and for all, Henry," interposed Mr. King, "I won't have it. As long as you are in this house you must conform to the rules we have seen fit to make. There

shall be no drinking here."

"All this bother," said Harry as he swung out of the room, "about a can of beer!" Really, his parents were impossible. They sat at home and, outside, life was bubbling and fermenting but they knew nothing of it. Their range was limited: in one direction, by a desk in an office; in the other, by a few similarly placed neighbours; and finally, by their church and chapel. How could they pronounce for him? And what had he done? Less than other lads of his age! All this flapdoodle about one pot of beer! He laughed bitterly to himself. To have ac-

cused him of bad habits — him! Had he not spent the evening trying to prevent a fellow-creature rushing headlong to destruction, reasoning with her, pleading; and that — he remembered Bill — at some risk? How little his parents understood him! Little fussy rules and all this chin-wagging when, at heart, he was such a decent chap.

He went upstairs, past the rooms in which the rest of the family slept, past the window in the bend, the window which lighted the upper landing. The weather being so warm, this window had been left open — in fact, forgotten; and Harry turned back to shut it. Although his parents treated him harshly, he would not bear malice. He would shut their window for them. Not his business, but if it rained in the night the stair-carpet would be damaged. Perhaps, when they realized his thought for them they would understand him a little better.

The night was starlit, with a rising moon, and Harry paused to look out. The window being in the side of the house, he had only a limited view of the road. A cat ran across, and in the opposite garden another called. Before him rose the dark bulk of No. 13. The houses in Parkside were detached, and a wall with a gravel path on either side separated No. 13 from No. 14. The privacy of the families inhabiting them, however, was ensured by an absence of windows; only one broke the large blank surface, and the panes of that were muffed and starred and coloured. Harry, glancing across, saw that the staircase window of No. 13 was open. How careless people were, other people! But no, some one was sitting by it. He looked more sharply and saw, etherealized by night, the girl to whom he had spoken that afternoon.

Mrs. Clarke, tired by her pleasuring, had returned in an irritable mood. Restless because so tired, she had

examined Megan Roberts's work and, discovering it had been scamped, had waxed wroth. The girl, under notice to leave at the end of the month, had come upstairs to bed. But the staircase window gave on the house in which, presumably, Harry was sleeping; and she had kneeled down by it and given rein to unhappy thought. Her mind was still obsessed by the vision which had been vouchsafed her. In which of the rooms of that dark moon-bathed house was he? She was an unlucky maid. If she had to leave Mrs. Clarke her mother would be displeased. Mrs. Clarke might refuse to give her a character, and what then? She wanted, she wanted very much, she wanted terribly to lean her head on the wide shoulder she had seen that day and pour out her troubles. She wanted to tell him all about it and, while she told, to feel his arm tightening - tightening -

A tear, large and glittering, fell on the window-sill, and Harry saw it. He glanced back into the house, saw his parents pass into their room and, their voices blending in a complaint that "the lad was difficult, was growing more so, but discipline must be maintained," close the door. Difficult?—when he only asked for a little natural liberty. Discipline?- when his impulses were so good, so kindly, when all he wanted was to help those in any sort of trouble. He heard the key turn in his father's door; then he leant out and called - he, too. He called very softly, but his was a carrying voice.

Megan had seen him, had thought her fortune almost too good to be true. "I am so miserable," she sobbed, and laid her head on her hands.

[&]quot;What's the matter?"

[&]quot;I can't - I can't tell you."

[&]quot;Shall I come over?"

[&]quot;Oh no! It does not matter."

"I'll come."

With difficulty she held the leap of her blood in check. If he should come, should really come . . .

"You could not," she said mournfully, and added a sob. The sob echoed through the boy's lonely, misjudged soul. Here was a fellow-sufferer. Those Clarkes!

What had they been doing to her?

"Oh, can't I?" He studied the possibilities. A water-butt, the pipe that fed it, the space between the pipe and window-sill. Could he do it? Once his fingers had gripped the sill he would be able to pull himself across, but a bare bit of wall lay between pipe and window.

"Please do not try. You could not do it; I am sure

you could not."

He felt the stimulus of her doubt. After all, though short, he had a long reach. The climb presented difficulties, but he thought he could manage it.

"I'll do it."

She could hardly speak for joy that she was to have her will. "I could let down one end of a sheet," she said tentatively, "and fasten the other to the banisters?"

" No," he said, " no."

"It would save you the climb."

He shook his head. "The climb," he answered blithely, "the climb is what I want."

RCHDEACON MARGERISON, known to his intimates as "the Seal," because he resembled that benign-faced animal, introduced Harry to the big boys' class at the Sunday-school. His large bland presence overshadowed the new teacher, and until he had withdrawn the lads hardly realized the quality of "Mr. Henry King, who has so kindly . . ."

Harry himself did not leave them in any doubt.

"I want you to understand," he said; and first one lad, then another, realized with amazement that Harry was no stranger. They had seen him playing football, had admired his methods. "I want you to understand," he said, "that I'm master here. What I say goes. I'll fight any one who thinks he is stronger than me; in fact—" his glance swept the class appraisingly, "I'll take any two of you on at once."

Like wooden images the boys stared before them. This was the Champion Chucker, the Rough 'Un. Strange to find him in Sunday-school, a little saddening; but they were not altogether convinced that he was dangerous. On the football field, yes, but this was different.

"Now we'll take the story of Samson, the strong man. I'll tell it to you and you'll try and remember it, and the one who remembers the most will get a ticket for the circus that's coming here next week."

A paper pellet whizzed through the air; the thrower looked more unconscious than any boy in the room, but

Harry knew. He had made, he had thrown, he had hidden the throwing of paper pellets. His glance lit on the thrower. "You boy over there—no, the one with the red head..."

"Me, sir?"

"You go outside and throw pellets in the street."

"I ain't done nothink, sir." But, almost immediately, Redhead found himself on the wrong side of the door. The others were impressed, but now and again some bolder spirit stirred. Miraculous that Harry should always drop on the inciter to mischief. Moreover, his methods were drastic. The only pleasure the class had that afternoon lay in the Bible story. The Rough 'Un, they agreed, could "pitch a yarn."

"Next Sunday," he said as he dismissed them, "I'll tell you of a chap who wanted to knock about a bit before he settled down. He was a pretty decent chap but up against it with his mother. The old lady was dead nuts on his younger brother — so this bloke, Esau, cleared out. Now then, dismiss and go quietly. No larking and no hanging about the door!"

The class scattered out of Harry's life and mind — the latter because he had remembered that his father, who also taught in the Sunday-school, was to the Archdeacon a sort of handy man; he would be detained doing odd jobs for at least another half-hour, and his absence might, by an active and intelligent son, be turned to account.

On reaching home his first care was to ascertain his mother's whereabouts. The Sunday ritual of clean and best clothes, of cooking and carving the dinner, had wearied Mrs. King. When the last plate had been set on the rack, the last spoon slipped into the basket, she had dropped on to the old horsehair sofa with a sigh of relief. She was alone in the house, in the quiet of the

big kitchen; and, putting up her feet, leaning her head on the hard black bolster, she had fallen into recuperative slumber. Harry, glancing through the window, saw her, and, reassured, went quietly into the house. He had been afraid she would be lying down in her room.

Upstairs the rooms were in daylight order - the white beds neatly made, the toilet-sets in correct array, the dressing-tables meticulously tidy. Blinds were drawn to keep out the sun, and behind them stretched the white curtains which were Mrs. King's pride. Harry, moving very quietly, went into his parents' bedroom. He meant to find the key of the safe, and he thought he knew where to look. The key of the tiny medicine-cupboard was kept in his mother's trinket-box. He left the box open, in case a retreat at short notice should become necessary. In the medicine-chest a row of innocent bottles met his gaze, the bulge of Dr. Gregory, the bluish transparency of glycerine, the round wooden box with the coloured wrapper in which were pills. No sign of a key. But stay; what was that sticking up at the back of Beecham? Was it the end of a forked tin label? Harry's groping hand closed on metal. His father kept the key behind the bottles. He had calculated on their being seldom taken down, on the fact that dusting tidying fingers would not come that way.

Harry's progress from cupboard to safe was executed with tiptoe caution. He had found that with which his mind at many an odd moment had been busy; and he was about to probe the secrets of that society to which his father must belong. He wondered whether it was in any way similar to his.

The key fitted and the heavy door swung open, disclosing an iron shelf, which divided the interior into equal halves. The lower was again divided by an upright,

and the whole was painted a green so pale it was almost white.

The door once open, Harry paused before investigating the sacred contents, paused to listen for a step. He had hurried home ahead of his father, ahead of his sisters, but they were following. He went on to the landing and leaned over the banisters. Not a sound broke the Sunday quiet. Except for the sleeper on the kitchen sofa the house was empty.

"I've got five, perhaps ten minutes," he thought, "but no more." At first glance the appearance of the safe struck him as disappointing. On the upper shelf lay ledgers, bank-books, account-books; below, in one compartment, was a black-and-gold cash-box; the other appeared to hold nothing but papers. The books were connected with business — the business of running the family, of paying bills, of putting by for a rainy day; the cash-box was equally uninteresting; and as for the old papers — well, he would turn them over, there might be something . . .

In front and on top lay a long envelope marked "My Will"—business again! Harry put it on one side. The articles must be replaced in the order in which they had been found. His father must not suspect that any one had been at the safe.

Under the will lay a bundle of letters tied with pink tape and labelled "Letters from Sophia." Sophia was Harry's mother, and he could not suppose anything she had written could be interesting. They were probably, he thought, just lovey-dovey letters, the usual sort of thing. He put them on the carpet, by the will, and looked again. Nothing under the packet of letters — yes, a single thin, oblong envelope. Taking it up, he found it was addressed, in an attractive curly writing, to his father,

and that, across it, in that father's hand, was, "Her last letter to me." The envelope was stiff, as if it contained some sort of card, and Harry felt a wakening interest. Who was this "her"? Not his mother; her writing was small and pointed. The envelope was open, worn indeed by touch and time, so worn that the edge was a little broken. Harry slipped out a sheet of paper on which were a few words in the same pretty writing—an assurance that she was getting better, that she hoped to see her "dear lad" again on the morrow but was too tired to write any more; and the signature, "Always your loving—Marie."

Folded in the sheet was an old carte-de-visite, a sweet smiling young girl, in full velvet skirt and wide sleeves. Across the quarter of a century since she had been laid to rest she smiled at the son of her "dear lad," and Harry, looking at her, felt that he too could have loved her, felt also a little ashamed. Not for the world now would he have his father know that he had been at the safe. He put the clear, old-fashioned photograph back into the letter. Time was flying and the square pale green compartment still held a number of objects, each of which must be taken out and examined before with a satisfied mind he could restore the key to Gregory and Beecham.

So far there had been secrets indeed, but no sign of any society, not even so much as a masonic jewel. He fancied, however, that behind will and letters he had caught a glimpse of something more promising, a gleam, a glitter. He pulled it out, and grinned to see that he had found a jackdaw-hoard of crystals. He had seen them before, could remember finding them in a Derbyshire cave, remembered too his father's interest. Mr. King, admiring the prisms, finding them incomprehensible, had slyly appropriated them, had hidden them here. To him

they had been a sort of treasure. Harry, by the glitter of these crystals, saw his father as boyish, as very little his senior. Mr. King was still young; he had grown up and married and become a father, but he was still only a boy.

"Is that all?" Harry was groping at the back of the safe. He had fancied he could discern something of darker colour, a thin oblong. He pulled out a small blue book.

"The Masterpiece," by Aristotle. He had never heard of it. Opening it haphazard, he read a sentence, another. Queer stuff this, made you hot to read it. Yet it was not the sort of book that you wanted to skip; by no means. You would read every word, but you would deny that you had done so. Once more, but this time with finger between the pages of the blue book, Harry listened at the head of the stairs. Faint sounds reached him. His mother was awake, was laying the tea. The others would not be long. He had but a few moments more.

No wonder his father had hidden the book! Such matters were never spoken of, never alluded to, in the family. As far as could be gathered from conversation, the young Kings were neuters and the whole six had been found under bushes in the vegetable-garden. The fact of sex was not concealed so much as ignored. In spite of the amazing candour of chickens and such-like, it did not exist.

Aristotle's treatise was a revelation to Harry. He gulped it with a goggling mind, very hot, rather uncomfortable, but anxious to read as much as possible.

Below, the sounds increased in number, in volume: umbrella-ferules hit the tin lining of the hat-stand, heels rang on the tiles, voices proclaimed an English thankfulness that Sunday — that day of services and best clothes and the big midday dinner — was nearly at an end.

Harry returning each article to its place in the safe, locked it and hid the key. Aristotle's treatise was an orange which had not yet been squeezed of more than half its juice. But there would be other Sundays during which his innocent parent would be taking a Bible class, other opportunities. . . .

It was, Harry thought, a disgusting book, and life was disgusting, and he couldn't believe these things were true, yet . . .

He did not want to bother with such matters; they were dirty.

There was Megan, of course, but that was different — moonlight and the dark and some one warm and loving, some one who understood him, who adored him, and who was soft, so soft. . . .

"The sinful lusts of the flesh."

The familiar phrase floated up through some well of memory but Harry thrust it away. He could not see that it applied to him. Neither did it apply to the subjects treated frankly in Aristotle's treatise. It must, he thought, apply to matters of which he was still in ignorance.

He let off steam by a ferocious brushing of his hair. The feel of the hard bristles on his thick black locks and on his scalp was refreshing. With each stroke the strange book was pushed farther away. When he laid down the brush his cheeks were no longer heated. He had begun to think of tea — was wondering, indeed, whether the cake his mother always made for Sunday would be big enough to go round twice.

When he reached the dining-room he found the others already seated.

[&]quot;What luck with the big boys, Henry?"

[&]quot;Lambs."

Mr. King smiled over a fuller knowledge of the class. "Ah, they let you down lightly today, but you wait a bit. I suppose you will take them again?" He thought to do so might have a steadying influence on the lad. Harry was growing up, growing into a manhood very different from that of his father. Mr. King wished that he were not such a busy man, that he could see more of his children, could join in their pursuits. He wondered whether the freedom allowed them by his preoccupation with money-getting was good for them, and he looked with doubt on the bright eyes and vigorous bodies that had been born to him.

"Doesn't that depend on whether I get into the Navy?"

The word Navy thrilled Mr. King. One son in the Civil Service, another an officer — better that than being a clerk in a railway office!

"How are you going to Bristol?"

"I'll cycle - save the train fare."

"Good!" Mr. King smiled to see his admonitions bearing fruit. His doubting fancies took a happier turn. After all, they were a satisfactory group of young people; while as for their mother, what a comely, wholesome woman she was! He had much for which to be thankful, and thankful he was. About him surged the placid Sunday talk, but Mr. King was not listening. His spirit was being lifted in thanksgiving, the thanksgiving of a sincere piety.

And Harry, glancing furtively at his father, was thinking of —" Marie!"

II

When he reached Bristol Harry was told that the examination would take place the following day, on board

the Victory. He had often sailed and tacked about the ship as she lay in her berthing, but never with any thought that it would some day be his duty to go aboard. She was visible from the windows of his uncle's house, a prominent and, he thought, beautiful bit of the foreground. For a long time that evening he sat looking at her and dreaming.

Stories of adventure, of dare-devil escapades, of resultant honour, flitted through his mind. He recalled the deed by which the first Victoria Cross had been won. Midshipman Lucas had picked up a shell that threatened a group of superior officers and, the fuse still burning, thrown it into the sea. A small thing to do. A little courage, a little address, no more.

If the naval surgeon would pass him, Harry King, he would do his best — oh, his humble, faithful best — to be worthy. His heart was so big in his body that the dream changed into a glamorous mist.

When he reached the *Victory* he was taken to an empty cabin and told to strip. As the minutes accumulated he regretted the promptitude of his obedience. A chilly wind was blowing, and Harry, stark as he came from his mother, grew gradually indignant. He was in a draught, and draughts were bad for you; he would catch cold. Why did not somebody come?

A sound of approaching voices reached him and a tanned, brown-bearded man came briskly into the cabin. He looked from Harry to the open port-hole. "Don't you find this a bit chilly?"

Harry liked the twinkling eyes and the trim air of the new-comer. "Oh, it's nothing," he said; "a little fresh air don't hurt." Nevertheless he shut the porthole.

"Well," said the surgeon, surveying him, "it does

not look as if there was much amiss with you," and he put a few questions.

In his answers Harry demonstrated the perfect fitness of his body, the wholesome nature of his upbringing; and, as each item was established, the surgeon nodded approvingly. This was the sort of lad the Navy needed.

"And in the engineering shops you've done the work of a smith? I suppose that accounts for this forearm."

The girth of the forearm in question was fourteen inches.

"I do what I can myself, dumb-bells, you know, and gym, and boxing."

"You can box?"

"A bit. Bill Mountain, the chap who put the Water-loo Kid to sleep, taught me."

"Ah, we've a fellow here who will be glad to meet you — Kennedy," and Harry slipped the name into a pigeonhole of memory. The new life showed a widening prospect. To fight for King and country — ay, and for Harry King. To sail the world over, to sail with a reputation, to find a fight awaiting him in every port. Let them trot out Kennedy — the sooner the better!

"We must get to work." Lannigan had satisfied himself that Harry was, as he put it in his Irish mind, "a broth of a bhoy," and that he would be a credit to the service. He hoped the examination would prove him to be physically fit. "We'll test your sight"—he set to work; "fair—a bit astigmatic, a bit myopic—not enough to matter. Your teeth—some time since you saw a dentist, eh? Two of the molars are pretty badly decayed. . . ."

One after another he pointed out tiny flaws in what he saw as a splendid young body, a body finer than any he could call to mind. Slowly, inexorably, he damped the fires of Harry's pride in his make-up, and it was to the lad as if the port-hole were still open, the breeze still playing on his naked skin.

"But," Lannigan smiled at him reassuringly, "you could not have done all you have if you weren't all right

in what really matters."

Harry's hopes revived. "What matters, then?"

"Oh, heart and lungs, that sort of thing."

An echo from the past troubled the waters of Harry's mind, but he would not heed. As the surgeon had said, a fellow cannot use hundred-pound dumb-bells, cannot swing locomotive break-blocks from his teeth, cannot play back for the Rangers, unless he is physically fit. The surgeon applied his stethoscope to the finely arching chest. He listened and then he looked at Harry, at Harry gazing trustfully out to sea.

"Have you had rheumatic fever?" he asked.

"When I was a little chap."

" Ah, yes."

"A long time ago." He must impress on this man, who a moment before had been twinkling at him reassuringly, that the illness was well over, that he had recovered from it to a state of absolute health — to more than that, to years of accumulated strength and well-being.

"Mitral stenosis," said the surgeon, grown, Harry thought, unaccountably grave. "Stenosis with some hy-

pertrophy."

"What is that?" The atmosphere seemed to have thickened. Harry's throat was constricted, he found a difficulty in uttering; he found himself afraid, horribly afraid, of what Lannigan was about to say.

"It is what rheumatic fever often leaves."

"It — it can be cured — surely?"

"You'll have it till the end of your days, you'll take it with you."

Harry turned to the heap of his clothes, took up one garment, then another.

"Have I - failed?"

"I'm sorry."

Mechanically he was slipping his limbs into the familiar openings. "I am so strong," he said dully, yet with an eye to the effect of his words. Surely that forearm, that chest, if the surgeon could be brought to consider them, must make a difference! The strongest lad for his age in the railway town, the strongest, whatever their age, of the apprentices. It must—oh, it must count!

Lannigan was writing diligently; he did not look up. He could not give the youth hope, for there was none to give. With such a heart Harry could not be passed for the Navy.

Harry, seeing his plea had failed, wondered desperately whether he himself might not be able to find the way out. He had always been considered resourceful. Now, if ever, was the time to prove the truth of that assumption.

"What is mitral - mitral . . ."

"Mitral stenosis?" Lannigan blotted the paper he had been filling in. "It is the narrowing of the mitral valve of the heart so that the blood has a difficulty in passing from the left auricle to the left ventricle."

"But how does that . . ."

"It is a diseased condition and unfits a man for any strenuous work."

"But I do strenuous work; I do it every day, all day."

"And at any moment the hypertrophy may fail. That"—he spoke with finality—"that is what dishes

you." Folding the paper, he gave it to Harry, who took it silently and as silently went back to the ship-chandler's shop.

"What news?" said Robert Hall.

But Harry could not yet utter the dire intelligence. "They'll let me know," he said. He met the older man's kindly gaze, and his eyes were bright as ever, bright and hard. Hall saw that something had gone wrong, saw too that explanations were as yet impossible — that it would be well, in fact, to speed the parting guest.

"If I start now," said Harry, "I shall get home tonight. I don't want to take another day off from the

works."

III

He could not remember a single incident of that fortyfive mile ride. It seemed to him that he was passing through blackness and heaviness and mist, that he had no body, was only a struggling, unhappy spirit. His one wish was to get home. He felt that some comfort awaited him under the familiar roof, and he rode blindly forward in search of it.

When he arrived the hour was late and only Mr. King was up. His mother's absence stirred in Harry a vague sense of relief; she never understood, but the governor—yes, the governor was different.

"Well?" said Mr. King, and Harry gave him the paper. To him, standing in a stupor of dull misery, it seemed a long, dreary while before his father, who had carried the paper nearer to the one gas-jet still alight, turned.

"What's mitral stenosis?"

Harry tried to remember what the surgeon had told him. Strange words and incomprehensible. All he had grasped was that they were damning. "Dunno." "Don't know?" said his father irritably. "You must know. I suppose you asked him?"

Harry was vaguely conscious of this irritation as a sort of sympathy. His father was disappointed, sorry for him, upset. "I did, and he—" he paused again, trying to find the words that were eluding him. "I can't remember—it was something about an auricle. Well," with a sudden burst, "he said two of my teeth were decayed. . . ."

That statement, repeated to the family, was responsible for the legend of Harry's failure. He had been refused because two of his teeth were imperfect! That was the way the authorities did things. A worthy lad was turned down because of a trifling defect any two-penny-ha'penny dentist could have remedied. Hardly encouraging to smart young fellows. Yet the Service was in need of such. The King family came to look on Harry's rejection as mere short-sighted policy on the part of the Admiralty. Eventually they spoke of it with that contemptuous tolerance which the general public feels for those in high places. But at first it was a blow; it hurt their pride, it stung.

"Never heard of such nonsense," said Mr. King angrily, and in his wrath tore the offending paper across and crumpled it and flung it into the grate. If only he could have dealt similarly with those who had judged, misjudged, his boy! "At any rate, it is not your fault. Well," a

pause, "I suppose we had better go to bed."

The son preceded his father up the stairs, and their feet were heavy on the treads. Harry, when he reached his room, turned up the light and glanced at his brother. He was thankful to find that James was asleep, that he had the place to himself. Hurriedly he flung off his clothes and slipped into bed.

He had been able to postpone the moment of full realization. No sooner was he between the sheets, however, than misery closed in upon him, carrying him from deep to blacker deep, carrying him to such bitter profundities he felt that that poor heart of his must burst.

He was no good, a crock; his strength had been as nothing, had not won him a moment's consideration, and it was to his strength that he had trusted. They had taken from him the plank on which he stood; they had flung him down, down. . . . A whole body and the powers of that body, but his body was damaged beyond repair — damaged by his folly, the folly of an innocent child, the folly of long ago. His heart would never be as the heart of other men. He must not hope to realize his dreams.

They did not consider him man enough for the Navy. They knew.

What was the use of a cracked vessel that at any moment might fall apart? Better come to an end than live like fellows he had seen — the fellows who did not play games because they couldn't, who looked on. . . .

It seemed to Harry as if he lay for hours, abject and despairing, as if his suffering only grew with time, as if it grew until it was unendurable and he cried out under it, cried out for help.

And help came.

At the moment of utmost agony the help came.

The weight of the world was lifted from him and his spirit floated up through ever-lessening darkness into light, and presently he was not in the light but of it. He was reconciled to life, and more than reconciled, for he had reached the source of it, become one with it. The change had come like the opening under intense pressure of a safety-valve. Harry passed in a moment from despair to ecstasy.

One with air and light, part of the sunlit universe, in communion with the ultimate. His spirit expanded. He was not to die. He was reserved for some unknown greatness — Chosen!

The recollection that he had not been considered man enough for the Navy, that he was a cracked vessel, was swept out of his mind. God had manifested Himself: not his father's, not his mother's God, but the Being he had always known was at the back of things. Harry believed, with utter faith, that he had been given a strength beyond his own; believed that, out of the multitudes of the earth, he had been chosen. He was uplifted, divinely glad, miraculously reconciled.

But ecstasy, the golden moment, the absolute light, passes, fades. It was as if the sun had set, but as if the sky were still bright, still glorious with colour. Harry's happiness persisted, but it was changed into the calm of beatitude. He lay content, a boat rocking in shallow waters after the amazing adventure of the deep—a boat which was to strand, ultimately, on the shores of sleep.

TV

Primed by their father, the Kings were careful not to ask Harry questions, not to speak of his visit to Bristol. They could not know that an after-experience had armoured him against kindly indiscretion.

Moreover, he had awakened to a mood of defiant planning. The Navy would not have him? He was to be prevented from serving his country? They should see.

Harry swinging break-blocks — two tied together with a handkerchief and held by his teeth — had attracted the attention of Daly, the shop foreman, a man of considerable personality. This man held strong opinions as to his and other people's duty to the State, and to him Harry went.

"You're a volunteer, aren't you?"

"Yes. What do you want?"

"I'd like to join."

"Very well, King. Every lad ought to serve his country in some way or other. Come down to the hall this evening."

"Can you keep it quiet till I'm in? The 'old man'

might cut up rough."

Mr. King and Mr. King's opinions were well known in the works. Daly, who had no sons, would have given a great deal for a boy like Harry. He grudged him to the father who not only failed to admire his gifts, but who, ambitious for social consideration, regarded them doubtingly.

"We'll get you over that all right. If you come down Tuesday night I'll have a uniform ready for you. The fit don't matter, we can fix that afterwards. Once you

are sworn in, your father can't do anything."

\mathbf{V}

Mrs. King was busy in the little square box known as the morning-room, or Mr. King's study, cutting out nightgowns for the chapel maternity-bags. From time to time her eyes rested on a little pile of red and black books which the spreading white material had pushed aside. Her thoughts, as she measured and cut and pinned, were occupied with them. They were the account books of the clothing club, and they had refused to balance. Obstinately, as if they were living and perverse entities, they had set themselves up against her. Again and again she had gone over the items, had reckoned the columns,

and every time she had been faced with a deficit. She acknowledged herself a poor hand at accounts. She had been so pleased when the circuit steward had asked her to be the treasurer of the clothing club. She had forgotten that figures were her bane, that they had a way of leaping together and entangling themselves and, when she dealt with them, of growing more and more entangled, until the muddle was a hard and unyielding knot.

It was of such a knot that she was thinking. Two pounds three shillings and sixpence! She had had the money, she supposed that she had spent it; but she had nothing to show for it — not a button, not even a bill. One thing only was certain: the money was gone.

It was gone and questions were being asked. That afternoon Mrs. Cobb, spiteful cat, had insinuated that the treasurer had been inexcusably careless. Careless! If that were all! But Miranda Cobb had looked at her oddly and so had Miss Dent. They thought . . .

The poor woman shrank from the thought, shrank as ashamedly as if she had been guilty. She had hurried home with the books, had gone over the items and the columns, until her head buzzed with rolls of flannelette, reels of cotton, pounds, shillings, and pence.

Whatever she did, the deficit persisted.

Nothing for it but to tell her husband, and she dreaded — oh, how she dreaded! — the moment of avowal. Henry was so particular about money. In spite of her forty-five years, she felt like a small child who had been naughty and for whom the dreaded moment of confession had come.

Her scissors went "crusp, crusp" through the stout long cloth. She was unconsciously hearing and registering the little sounds of the house. Mab was in bed and asleep, but Nancy was still moving about overhead, and only a few minutes ago James had carried his drawing materials into the dining-room. Harry, about whose movements and companions she was always dubious, was out, and so was her husband. But she was expecting the latter, had only just finished laying for him a cold supper. He was absent on one of those evening jobs by which he augmented his income.

When he came in she must show him the books, tell him what Miranda Cobb had said, beg him to believe there was no truth in what she had thought, had insinuated. The creak of a stairboard, and her heart jumped; but it was only one of the noises of the night.

What would Henry say? Two pounds! And she had been so careful never to use a penny of the money for anything not strictly clothing club. She had even, when paying the bills, added a shilling here, a few pence there, from money that was strictly hers, being her dress allowance.

Yet she could not account for two pounds, three shillings and sixpence!

The sounds of movement overhead had ceased and the house was still. Her heart jumped again as the stillness was broken by the insertion of Mr. King's key in the lock of the front door. Her fingers shook so that she let the scissors fall. She did not hear the resultant clatter, did not realize she had been holding them. The moment for which she had been waiting, the moment she had been dreading, was come.

"I've something to tell you."

"Yes, Henry?"

"They want me to be secretary, for the technical schools."

"How"—she moistened her lips—"how wise of them."

"I held out for decent pay, got it too, and now I shall be able to give Richard more. He is always saying his allowance is less than that of the other men at Balliol." Mr. King rolled the name of the college off his tongue; he enjoyed uttering it. "My son at Oxford" and "my son at the 'Varsity," "My son at Balliol"—the phrases were sweet to him as sugar-plums to a child.

"Yes," she said.

"What's the matter?"

Picking up the books, she offered them to him. She could not speak. With concern he saw her face was puckering, that she was on the verge of tears. "Why, my dear, what's this?"

Words came with a rush. "The accounts of the clothing club. I've gone over them again and again, but I can't . . . oh, Henry, I can't make them come right."

"Are you much out?"

She could not give utterance to that nightmare total. Two pounds, three shillings and sixpence! It loomed tremendous. Impossible that she should have lost it. He would not be able to believe her. "Oh, don't — don't ask me. . . ."

"But if I'm to be of any use, I must know."

"Henry . . "her voice broke and she stood struggling for control, "they think — they think I've taken the money." If only she could get her voice out, past the constriction in her throat, past the sobs!

At last they came, but together, voice and sobs. "I never touched a farthing of it — never, never. I promise you, Henry, I never touched it."

Mr. King understood, and the husband in him was moved. He went up and put his arms about her and

kissed her tenderly on her wet cheek. "My dear," he said strongly, "I know you didn't."

She clung to him. She put her head on his shoulder and she sobbed.

"There, there, my dear. I know you couldn't."

"Oh," she said after a time, "I've had such a day. I was so afraid you wouldn't understand, and I went over and over the accounts and added them different ways, but nothing made any difference. I suppose I've been careless. . . ."

"Yes," said Mr. King, but very kindly.

"In future I'll get you to keep them for me—" Her tone changed to one of simple amazement. "Gracious!" she cried, and looked across her husband's shoulder towards the door. Mr. King, releasing her, turned in the same direction, and he, too, was taken aback.

Harry, entering in his usual fashion — that is to say, quickly and quietly — had been checked on the threshold by the unusual sight of his mother being kissed and comforted by his father, an occurrence which in his experience was without precedent. In his surprise he had forgotten what had brought him thither, forgotten also the change in his appearance.

"What is this mummery?" said Mr. King, recovering

his wits.

"Mummery?" began Harry, then recollected that he was wearing the Glengarry cap with two streamers, the black-and-green uniform of the Rifle Volunteers. "I took the oath this evening."

"You have joined? Joined the Volunteers?"

"If I can't serve my country one way I will another."

"But," said Mr. King, secure of his facts, "people of our sort don't join the Volunteers."

"If we had a war," said Harry, quoting the shop foreman, "a big war — and you never know what is coming — I should offer to fight. I," becoming Harry King again, "should love a bit of soldiering."

"Meanwhile you want to dress up and go band-marching," said Mr. King severely, "with all the riff-raff of

the town."

"Oh, come, it's not so bad as that."

"Soldiering of any sort," said Mr. King with conviction, "and this amateur kind is no different from the other, leads to drinking and vice. I never thought a son of mine would become a volunteer."

"There are as good men in the Army as out of it."

"The temptations are terrible."

"And," interposed Mrs. King, "we are always praying 'Lead us not into temptation.' Besides, Amos's son is a volunteer."

Amos was the odd-job man employed in the garden and to clean boots and knives.

"What does it matter?" Harry liked young Amos, was teaching him to box, meant to make a man of him.

"Your associates, Henry, should be people you can bring to your home, people you can introduce to your mother and sisters. Amos is a respectable man but his children are hardly fit companions for Bet and Nancy."

Harry did not cavil, neither did he feel that his father was right. Upstairs, in his room, was a book—"The Blight of Respectability." When he had read it he would be able to confute these views, convince his father of lifelong mistakes.

"Also," said Mr. King, warming a little, "I disapprove of the under-the-carpet way in which you have gone about this business. You should have come to me. I never refuse you children anything that is for your good."

"It's done now," said Harry, still unable to agree. He looked about him, vaguely disappointed. He had meant to create a sensation, to startle his family, but he had also hoped they would admire. A pity his sisters were in bed and asleep. "Mother!" he said. "Mother—don't you like my uniform?"

"Yes," said Mrs. King unexpectedly; "yes, I do.

Now be off with you."

"Well, really, Sophy, I'm surprised at you!" remonstrated Mr. King as the door closed on Harry.

But Mrs. King was still under the influence of softening emotion.

"Well, Henry," she said, "volunteering may be low, but that uniform makes him look a smart lad." She took the elastic band off the clothing-club books and pointed to the total. "Two pounds, three shillings and sixpence."

"I'll bring it to you, my dear. I'll — er — go and get.

it now."

LD AMOS, wheeling a heavy barrow up the slight incline on the top of which stood No. 14 Parkside, started as a hand clapped him on the shoulder and a voice cried, "Hullo! What have you got there?"

"You are home early, sir." If he had not supposed Mr. King at work in the office he would hardly have fetched the dumb-bells. "These? They be some of young master's contraptions."

Mr. King, leaning over, put a hand to one of the heaviest. He was surprised to find it as unyielding as if it had been nailed to the floor of the barrow. "Why . . . ?" said he.

"Thiccy there's all of a hundredweight, but that little 'un bain't more'n a seven-pounder."

"What does he want them for?"

"'Tis summat to do wi' the display down at th' drill-hall. But there's Master Harry waiting. He can tell 'ee."

Mr. King, looking up, met young hopeful's apprehensive eve.

"Turning your home into an iron foundry?" he asked mildly. He had been impressed by the fact that Harry could play with dumb-bells that he, the father, could not lift.

"I'm doing a turn with these on the nineteenth," said Harry hardily, "and I must practise a bit." It had been his intention to smuggle them into the house before his father returned from the office, and to use them after he was supposed by the rest of the family to be in bed.

"The nineteenth?" said Mr. King vaguely. His mind had returned to the consideration of some news Arch-

deacon Margerison had given him.

"It's the annual display at the drill-hall. I am arranging the program this year. You must come to it, father."

"I? Oh, I shouldn't have time!"

"I wish you'd take an evening off just for once." If his father saw what he could do, surely he would be proud of him, proud as were the men at the works and the frequenters of the "George."

"Well, we'll see." He was pleased the boy should seem anxious to have him present — a very proper spirit.

Harry, lifting the two heaviest dumb-bells, began to walk away.

"Where are you going to keep them?"

"The bottom of my cupboard."

"You can't carry them up all those stairs."

Harry only smiled and Mr. King, watching the compact figure as it went up the rough granite steps, wished for a moment that he could see more of his boy — that he were not busy, evening after evening, earning the money for Richard, for the girls' boarding-school, the money that was to lift his children a step up the social ladder, to raise their heads just a foot higher than his had been. He was missing something. Was that something only a pleasure? Was it not also an opportunity, the opportunity to guide young Harry — Harry who was naturally such a wild lad?

Which brought him back to the Archdeacon's warning. "If it had been you, Mr. King, no harm could possibly

ensue; but a young fellow like your son! I should certainly think twice before giving my consent."

When Harry, breathing a little quickly, reappeared, his father tackled him.

- "What's this I hear about your playing football for the Midland Counties?"
 - "I played for them all last season."
- "I mean this idea of your playing in the team that is being sent to Paris."

To play for England against France had long been one of Harry's ambitions, but he had kept it secret. "If they'll only send me . . ." he said.

- "I most sincerely hope they won't."
- "I don't see why you should be against it?" From under his thick thatch he stared resentfully at his father. Was there nothing he could do of which the "old man" approved? Every one else thought he would be lucky if he were chosen. Lucky? A poor word!
 - "Paris is a hotbed of vice."
- "I'm going on for nineteen, and if I can't take care of myself now I shall never be able to."
 - "You won't go with my consent."
- "Look here, father, it's no good you yowking to me about it! You've never been to Paris and you're only going by what people say. If you were speaking because you'd been through the mill it would be different, but you you don't know!"

Was this the result, thought poor Mr. King, of keeping yourself unspotted from the world? A blameless youth and your son, in the fulness of time, reproached you with it! How differently things turned out from what one had been led to expect. In books the good man had the respect of the rising generation, was deferred to and consulted. His experience had been that the good man

was left high on a bank and that the stream of young life rushed by, sufficient unto itself.

"If you mean that I haven't . . ." he began.

"That's it," said intolerant youth.

"In this matter our duty is plain. A man should avoid that which is evil."

"Ah," said Harry, "but I never was afraid of things." He picked up a further load of dumb-bells and carried them into the house.

Mr. King, following, sought his wife. He had cleaved to that which is good and his children saw it as weakness, fear. They dispossessed him of his attributes, they drove him out. Only with Sophy was he any longer of the first importance, but he and she—they were of an age. He went to her as one seeking a refuge from rain and wind. In autumn the sun sets early and the evenings are dark, but there is the fire on the hearth—the fire at which man may warm his poor heart.

Harry, on the contrary, was jubilant. So it had got about that there was a chance of his being chosen to play for England! Eleven men out of the thousands who played football and he one of the eleven! To play for

England, in a small way to represent her!

And his father disapproved! He would rather Harry were teaching in Sunday-school. Harry grinned over his recollections. He had done as they wished, taken on a class, brought it along on a diet of strong men, on Samson, Esau, and the fall of Jericho: "Trumpets are all very well, but the Jews were no fools and they knew God helps those who help themselves. They mined those walls, and the trumpeting was the signal to light the fuses. Can't you see them . . ."

Unfortunately, the Bible according to Harry King did not meet with the approval of the authorities. After three Sundays a more orthodox teacher was induced, against his better judgment, to take Harry's place, and the Sunday-school knew him no more.

He had a rich gurgling laugh, and as he laid the dumbbells in a row along the bottom of the cupboard which held his coats he chuckled over the poor Archdeacon's troubles. Margerison had been anxious to get rid of his unorthodox teacher, but even more anxious not to offend the susceptibilities of that teacher's very useful father! Harry laughed, too, at thought of the man who had succeeded him, old Bobbie Chapman—"Two Puddings"—Chapman who had no hold over them, never would, never could have. They would be sky-larking all the time. With Harry they had been mice; he had seen to it that they were. He had been a head-on collision, had backed away from controversy but stood stubborn as a mule to any who were hunting trouble; and he had enjoyed it, enjoyed every minute of it.

He went to fetch the last of the dumb-bells, and, passing the staircase window, saw that some one was sitting at that of No. 13, sitting as Megan Roberts had sat. The sight sent a thrill through him, sent his thought to the idyll of two summers ago. She had had successors, a crowd of light quick fancies, but she had been the first. How sweet she had been, sweet all over! He had loved to pinch up little bits of her delicate arm between his strong thumb and finger, to hurt her a little, a very little, enough to make her turn on him with a dash of fierceness.

It was over so quickly. A few meetings, desperate climbs through darkness to a little warm eyrie, and she was gone. She had not written. He did not know where in the wide world was that passionate heart and he hardly cared. He had the perfect memory of her, and in the

rush of tumbling emotions was too busy to remember, too eager on fresh scents to long for a renewal of what had grown familiar.

If his father had known! If he knew where Harry went and what he did and who were his associates, the hundred-and-one interests of his keen, busy, questing existence. If his father only knew half —

He would disapprove, of course, and yet — why should he? Had he himself never been young? Harry, bursting with vitality, with desire, with every sort of emotion, conscious of the wild riot of his pulses, wondered if his father's spring-time had been less sappy? Had he been — different? Was he not driven by instincts which Harry divined under the subterfuges and superficialities of other men? If he were, surely he must understand how it was with his sons, with this particular son?

Harry added the last dumb-bell to the line and sat for a moment on the end of his bed, gloating. He had been at some pains to get them made for him, and he was to use them on the platform of the drill-hall. He was to do the strong-man turn on the nineteenth — show the railway town how much he could lift, lift with his hands, lift with his teeth. Like Richard, he, Harry, was gradually coming into his own — a different own certainly but, in its way, as valuable to the country.

With a breath of happy anticipation he rose and took his way into the town. He was due at the "George" for a committee meeting. Dr. Ryan, the man who drove the best horses, Cunliffe the auctioneer, Bell the wine merchant, were members, and were backing Harry's effort to make the gym. display a success. Old Bill Mountain, though not of their class, had also been admitted. Boxing contests were to follow on Harry's turn as strong

man, and Mountain's knowledge of the rules was useful.

"It's a good program," said Bell, the big, lame wine-merchant, "but it ends a bit tamely."

"Why not match a pair of old stiffs for a fifteen-round exhibition spar?" suggested Mountain.

"How much would they want?"

"Side-stakes and a purse of quids," said Mountain.
"I could get Jerry O'Gorman and Sid Hobbs for twenty-five apiece."

"An excellent idea," said Dr. Ryan in his precise way.

"Take the town by storm," chuckled Cunliffe. "We shall have to put up the money among us, I suppose? Well, here's a fiver!"

"Mr. Ponsonby at the Grange can box a bit," suggested Mountain; "he'd help."

"I believe he would, and there are others. Then it's agreed?" Ryan put the motion to the committee. "We find the money and Mountain writes to the men."

"You go ahead, old cock," cried Cunliffe enthusiastically, "and get 'em; and as soon as you know for certain, we'll put their dials in the pub. windows and bill 'em all over the town."

"I'll send a notice to the *Dispatch*," said Dr. Ryan, "and it would be as well, perhaps, to have handbills left at the doors. It's fortunate the hall is so large. It will be crowded."

II

Mr. King, coming home one evening after he had finished his secretarial work at the technical schools, walking briskly through streets that had been flushed and left shining by a shower, was brought up short by something in a shop-window of which he had caught a passing glimpse. The shop was that of a jeweller, and the window

displayed a silver cup. Against it two photographs had been placed upright, and below them was a small handbill. To Mr. King the features of both photographs were familiar. That on the right represented a young man in his office, by name Ted Mudford, a young man of drinking, betting proclivities, the incarnation of every thing of which Mr. King disapproved. The other — the father could hardly believe it, but there was no possibility of mistake!— the half-naked lad, with arms folded across his chest, big arms across a tremendous chest, was Harry.

Mr. King stared at the upturned face, the smooth young face of eighteen, all curves and roundness and trust. He stared at the stark presentment of the lad's muscles, at the shoulders stretching almost incredibly broad, at the forearm; and if for a moment he had thrilled at the sight of that flesh which he had fathered, the thrill was quickly drowned by a rush of less primitive emotions. His son, naked, photographed naked, set up in a shopwindow for all to see! Nakedness was for bedrooms, and even then only for a moment, the moment between shirt and nightshirt. Mr. King was inexpressibly shocked.

How had it come about? Why were the lads exposed to public view? Mr. King did not read the Dispatch, had not seen the handbills, and had forgotten about the display. His glance travelled from the photographs to the printed leaflet below, and even then he was some time in discovering what he wanted to know. The names of O'Gorman and Hobbs were in heavily leaded type, also the number of rounds, the amount of the purse offered. Mr. King, to his disgust, presently realized that he was looking at the program of the gymnastic display, and that the last and most important event was to be a boxing contest between professionals of the ring.

But Harry, what had that to do with Harry? His

father made out at last that several minor contests preceded the Hobbs-O'Gorman fight, the last of these being between Ted Mudford and Henry King. The lads were well known in the town, popular favourites on the football field and elsewhere — hence the photographs.

"Not while he lives in my house," said Mr. King, and

set his lips in a straight line.

He saw his social position menaced by Harry's undisciplined energies.

Confound Harry! Did he never think of anybody but himself? Did he not realize how unpleasant it would be for them all if that photograph were recognized by acquaintances newly made and a little higher in the scale; by clergymen's wives who were inclined to smile on Richard and invite him to their vicarages, by rich schoolfellows who asked Bet to stay with them? Mr. King hurried through the shining streets. The photograph must be taken out of Barham's window. He felt sure it had not been there more than a few hours; possibly not many people had noticed it.

"I've just come past Barham's in High Street," he said ominously, as he entered the dining-room where Harry was lingering while his mother replaced a lost button. "What is the meaning of that disgusting photograph of

you, Henry?"

Harry, hit on a tender spot, changed colour. "It's only me to the waist!"

"Only!" snorted Mr. King. "It's — it's indecent!"
"Oh, really, father!" Used to the simple garb of
the athlete, Harry had lost the family point of view, but
the accusation troubled him. Indecent? He glanced at
his placid mother. Would she think it indecent? He
supposed she might. He grew hot and uncomfortable;
for the first time in his life he felt ashamed.

"What is the matter?" said Mrs. King, sticking her needle through a hole in the button.

"There's a photograph of Henry in Barham's shop."

"I saw it this afternoon."

"My dear - he has nothing on!"

"He's made much like other lads, I suppose." Naked bodies were nothing to the woman who had borne six children. She twisted the thread round her stitches and fastened it at the back. "There!" she said comfortably, and Harry blessed her. The queer, hot feeling had gone; he was no longer at a disadvantage with his father.

"I don't understand you, Sophy. To expose the body

is revolting to all clean-minded people."

"It may be, Henry, but I've seen them so often I can't

think anything of it."

"Thank goodness, then, that I have a clear sense of right and wrong." He was offended by her lack of sympathy. "This photograph must be taken out at once."

" All right."

"I see there is to be a fight between you and Ted Mudford."

"He challenged me."

"You are to fight in public?"

"At the display." What was his father driving at?

"At an entertainment of which the principal attraction is to be a fight between real pugilists."

" Yes."

Mr. King was standing on the hearthrug. He straddled his legs a little. "Now, Henry, I will not have you mixed up with anything of the sort."

"What?" said the surprised Harry.

"I won't have it. You have come to the parting of the ways, Henry. It's your home, your family, or these brutal associates of yours. I won't have you fight Mudford at the display."

"But you knew about this entertainment, father. It's the annual display, and it's to raise funds for the hospital."

"It's not the usual thing, for you have introduced the element of professionalism, you are bringing people to this town whose mode of life is a disgrace to humanity."

"They are decent chaps."

"They are brutalized, degraded." The tremulous shrinking which kept him clothed even in the presence of his wife made boxing a matter about which it was difficult for him to be reasonable. The body was sacred, not to be approached by a razor, not to be exposed to wanton injury. "Do you think that man, made in the image of God, was meant to be battered about by the fists of other men? The idea is horrible. And to think there are people who earn their living by inflicting injuries on each other."

Mr. King was speaking nakedly, and he got from Harry as sincere an answer.

"I'd rather be a fighter than anything else in the world."

Silence fell on this declaration. Mrs. King looked at her offspring in surprise at his audacity. She had had a short way with her children, and she regretted that this short way was no longer practicable.

"You don't mean it!" cried poor Mr. King, rallying his forces. Harry a pugilist? Better he had never been born. Of all things — a pugilist! Not even the astounding physical development of the lad had suggested that this might follow. To Mr. King it would not have seemed possible that any one of his blood could want to become a prize-fighter; as well be a scavenger, a hangman. . . .

"I do mean it."

"Nonsense, Harry," said his mother, and felt she had disposed of the matter.

"You don't know what you are talking about." He looked anxiously at his son, at the square, resolute little vessel that had been built to sail on perilous seas, that was ready to up-anchor and be off. At all costs, Harry must be prevented from sailing this particular sea. Mr. King marshalled the reasons that could be urged against adventuring on its waters. "We are civilized; we don't need to defend ourselves with our hands. The law fights our battles and defends us from aggression. This boxing is a relic of barbarism; the man who makes his living by it is nothing better than a savage."

Though it was Harry's habit to distrust his father's conclusions, the older man's position in the family gave them weight. The lad, longing to be a pugilist, yet doubted. He could not put into words his feeling that fighting called out and developed fine qualities. He could not have named those qualities; he was conscious of them but could not bring out their names, flaunt them in the face of authority.

"I was made for a fighter," he said, feeling that his father's opposition was a forerunner of the attitude that would be taken by the rest of the family, by friends, by acquaintances. "I should make a good thing of it. I might—" he warmed at the thought, "I'm a heavy-weight, you know, and yet I'm quick, and that's unusual. I might be in the running for the belt." He was thinking, as Harry always thought, of the utmost, the extreme, the top. Some one must be the champion; why not he?

"In fact," said Mr. King, finding an apposite quotation in his mind and seizing it, "you'd rather 'rule in hell than serve in heaven'? No, no, my boy, I haven't brought

you up in a good home, among respectable, God-fearing people, for you to throw away every chance of making a position for yourself. You are an engineer. You may become as great a man as Brunel. This is sheer boyish folly, the folly that makes a child want to be a policeman or an engine-driver. You are attracted by the show and glitter, by the easy money; but easy come is easy go and the show is hollow—hollow."

He held out the mess of pottage, asking in return Harry's birthright of gifts; and Harry knew, deep down, that for him the exchange was a loss, a heavy, irreparable loss; but, being young, he wavered. Was his father mistaken? He was old and, up to a point, experienced. Was what he said true? Was fighting, after all, brutal and brutalizing?

Of late Harry had spent his spare money on tickets to London. The ring drew him, and he had seen a good many contests, the good and the bad side of fighting. The boxers were men, fierce, hard men. Was he, Harry King, of that company; or had his life blossomed under the sun for other, perhaps finer, purposes?

If he were only sure!

His father seemed so confident, and with him, backing him up, strengthening his conviction, was the family. People looked down on pugilists. Could he, Harry, bear to number himself with a folk held in light esteem by his parents and their friends? His brothers were rising in the world. Could he take a step down, choose for his companions rough and simple people? Had he the strength to come out from his middle-class associations, cast off the trappings of respectability? His instincts bade him set the world at defiance and follow his bent; but should instinct be the guide?

Harry was so young.

He had no certitude as to the course he should pursue, Things of no importance tugged at him, pulling him hither and thither. He discounted the promptings of his nature, he wavered. If he became a pugilist the family would say he had disgraced them. He could not do it. Engineering, though it had lost interest for him, must be his life-work, fighting only a hobby. He made the choice deliberately, wondering vaguely why he should feel so depressed, so unhappy.

"All right," he said in a voice that struck his father as

strangely lifeless.

Mr. King, who had waited for the decision in fear and trembling, was restored to cheerfulness; his spirits rose. "You'll come to see, my boy," he boasted in his little wisdom, "that I'm in the right. You'll live to thank me for having been firm with you."

At the moment Harry was seeing his future as a wheel

of laborious days, each more dismal than the last.

"Now," said Mr. King, big as a frog who has drawn a deep breath, "you'll drop this fighting at the gym. display."

Harry woke up. "I can't do that."

"Why not?"

"People have backed me to win, put money on me. I can't let them lose it."

"Nonsense! What are their bets to do with you?"

"I can't go back on them."

The taste of power had gone to Mr. King's head. "But I won't have it," he paused, then spoke with emphasis, "not while you are under my roof."

He saw that he had Harry's full and questioning attention. "Not while you are under my roof," he repeated.

Harry's articles had still some months to run. He reflected rapidly on his position. Could he support him-

self on the pittance paid to an apprentice? His father was declaring that if he, Harry, fought Mudford he would be given the key of the street — turned adrift.

"You hear what I say? You choose, once for all.

It's the low public-house lot or your home."

Mr. King believed that he was clinching the matter, that it was necessary to be firm with the lad. He did not quite mean what he said; but Harry did not realize this. He knew that he was old enough to leave home, that many boys of his age were "on their own."

"I'll think it over," he said, his voice once more lifeless. Take everything they would; oh, they were a merry crew! His home or the streets, and that because he was set on keeping an undertaking he had given. He went to bed, wondering whether if the worst came to the worst, he could manage on the fifteen shillings a week that he was paid. The whole town knew he was to meet Mudford. He could not — oh, he could not "scratch"!

That night his sleep was haunted by dreams in which he was fleeing from various sorts of adversity, was taking refuge in a cave, finding in its depths a dark tranquillity.

Morning brought a solution of his difficulty.

Mudford, he remembered, was in his father's office. He had often heard Mr. King complain of the young fellow's laziness, declare that his being there was due to influence; some one was interested, some one on the board. Mr. King, pulling all the strings he could for his brood, objected to influence as unfair, objected to Mudford because influence was his stepping-stone, but objected to him also because he was so often insolent, because he made covert fun of his senior. Mr. King might, Harry thought, be glad if Mudford came off second best in a boxing contest, might even feel his heart go out to the victor.

At any rate, Harry would risk it.

III

When the evening came he was one of those deputed to meet Hobbs and O'Gorman. He stood with Cunliffe and Dr. Ryan, proudly conscious that the group of which he formed a part was the observed of all the station officials. He was preening himself because this display, the program of which he had arranged, was bringing these stars from London. He had done it — he, Harry King. Standing by Dr. Ryan, stiffly impassive, he was, in fact, a little keg bursting with pride. The bands of his self-control were iron round his staves, but within was a molten glow, a swelling satisfaction. Forgotten were his father's admonitions. He was, as usual, living, living intensely, in the moment.

The train ran into the station. The door of a first-class compartment opened and two men in hard hats and long check overcoats got out. Harry had an impression of brightness, of stripy waistcoats, tawny neck-clothes — a general look of hard, shiny competence. He swayed forward in the wake of Dr. Ryan, and in another moment was being introduced, was listening to Hobbs's deep, rough "Glad to meet you," to O'Gorman's Cornish accent.

He rushed home to get his tea. He would be wanted at the hall, a thousand-and-one things to see to; his mind was running over with the trifles, each so important, for which he was responsible. To his dismay, he found that his mother had forgotten he wanted an early tea. He burst into the dining-room, where Bet, home for the Christmas holidays, was shaking a mop of damp, newly washed hair before the fire; while Richard, down from

Balliol, was discussing an invitation from Archdeacon Margerison.

"They don't ask us," Bet was saying, and Richard had grinned with, "Not yet, my child, but they will."

"Can I have my tea, mother?" cried Harry. On the mantelpiece was an envelope containing tickets, the frontrow tickets he had sent the family. He glanced at them, wondering who was coming but too shy to ask.

"It isn't tea-time," grudged Mrs. King, and Bet, generally ready to run on her youngest brother's errands,

did not move.

"I'm wanted at the hall," said Harry, giving everybody an opportunity.

"There is cake in the larder and some milk; you must

make do with that."

Harry, munching a thick slice of yeast-cake, pondered the situation. Why had his remark fallen flat? Was every one so full of his and her interests they had no leisure for a brother's affairs? His heart swelled at the unkindness. This was his evening, his first appearance on a platform, his challenge to the town. Surely his people were proud of him?

And in the dining-room Nancy, the most outspoken of the sisters, was exclaiming bitterly, "Henry? He's noth-

ing but a disgrace to us!"

IV

Harry, at the back of the hall, was kept busy, but he found time for an occasional glance at the row of seats held inviolate by those blue tickets on the mantelshelf at home. The hall was filling rapidly. He saw many people whom he knew. Susie Allen's pretty, appealing face

smiled stagewards from the third row. Bobbie Chapman was sitting next to her — Bobbie whose suit of "real" velvet corduroy he had once envied so desperately, Bobbie who had been the first of his compeers to own a velocipede. Once more Bobbie would be looking on while he, Harry, did the trick. But — Harry looked thoughtfully at Susie. He was glad she had come to see him box Mudford; it was sweet of her. When he did his strong-man feats he would do them for her. He would gather up her attention, make her forget altogether that Bobbie was sitting there. Perhaps he might even find time between the events to run round and speak to her; he would see.

Were his people never coming? The hall was nearly full. It did not look well for them to be so late.

"King - you are wanted -"

He did not get back to his spy-hole until after the first event, and then, with a rush of joy, saw that the seats were occupied. A second glance extinguished his joy. The seats were occupied, but by strangers.

No member of the family had come: not Richard, before whom he wanted to show off; not his father, whom he had hoped to impress; not even Bet. His heart filled with bitterness. What a mouldy lot they were! This was his hour and they were refusing to see it as of any importance; it was possible—he could not believe it probable—they even disapproved.

Yet the display was going with a swing and a rush. The hall was crammed. The audience, hearty, sporting, unrefined, had come in from the country round — farmers who fancied their own muscles, dealers, graziers, fanciers. The railway works had contributed its quota; Bill had come with the missus and Jack had brought his Jill. The black-coats had stayed away, no clergy were present. But squire had come, both the old man and his

soldier son; they were all right, the Ponsonbys — men!

If they could come, surely his people . . .

If the Ponsonbys approved, who were his people to object? He saw the squire against the background of his big house and grounds; saw his own people, obdurate, prejudiced, small.

His bitterness made him reckless. When his turn came he attempted feats that he had not rehearsed, did things he was never to do again. And the audience applauded, they went wild over him. Yes, these people understood; he was no stranger to them but the boy who had grown up in their midst. Only to his own people was he a stranger.

It was because they were narrow-minded and ignorant! If he had had the gift of the gab he could have expounded the matter to them, made them see where they were mistaken.

The boxing contest between Harry and Ted Mudford was an easy win for the former; but the victory left him sour. His father should have been looking on. . . .

The referee addressed the house: "These gentlemen," said he, indicating the pugilists who, clad, the one in a purple dressing-gown, the other in a striped red-and-white, were awaiting their turn,—"these gentlemen have come from London to give us fifteen rounds of exhibition sparring — Queensberry rules. Left, Mr. O'Gorman; right, Mr. Sid Hobbs."

As the men walked into the middle of the ring Harry saw in a flash what he must do. His father was only opposed to fighting because he knew nothing about it. He had never met any boxers; he was ignorant of their fine and manly qualities. It was for Harry to enlighten him, and when would he have a better opportunity? His

mind was made up on the instant. He would persuade, cajole, somehow induce the boxers to accompany him home; he would introduce them to the family circle.

As soon as the entertainment was at an end Harry went up to the men with his request. His feats of strength and his boxing had made a pleasant impression. They were willing to see more of him.

"Got to catch the last train back to town," said O'Gorman good-naturedly.

"You'll have plenty of time."

"All right, then. We'll come as soon as your committee has done with us."

The doorkeeper touched Harry's arm. "There's some men want to see you. I've took 'em along to the dressing-room."

"Want to see me?" Harry, somewhat surprised, hurried to the back of the stage.

Three big weather-beaten men, who looked out of place under a roof, were blocking the door. They moved aside for him.

"We thought we'd like to see you about those weights."
Harry looked squarely into the speaker's eyes. "Want
to test them?"

" Well . . ."

"Thought they were faked, did you? Come on, then."
The smallest of the three examined the dumb-bells. "I can carry four hundredweight on my back," he said.
"I take the bags of chemical manure down to the fields that way; less trouble than getting out horse and cart."
He lifted the dumb-bells, he tested them, and his manner changed. "Tis right enough what the young chap said," and he turned back to Harry, a new heartiness in his tones. "Look here, you come and play with these toys

over my way. I'm Jack Joicey — Joicey and Sons of Gormeston — and I'll fill a hall for 'ee. What d'you say?"

"I say — that, if my committee will agree, I'll come with pleasure."

"Well spoken. Dr. Ryan's on your committee, ain't he? I know him. Come along, then! This day week, and the hospital to benefit."

Harry led him to the group about the pugilists. He had heard vaguely of Jack Joicey, the breeder of champion stock, the big farmer out at Gormeston; and, his mind racing ahead, he saw himself one of a troop of athletes giving exhibitions of strength now at Gormeston, now at Townley, perhaps even at Stroud and Cirencester.

As, having secured his pugilists, he walked off between them, his ears tingled. "Never see such lifting strength in all my born days!"

V

It was fortunate for Harry that Hobbs and O'Gorman were actually the simple fellows for whom he had taken them. Hobbs had been a collier, O'Gorman was the son of a small Cornish farmer. Both were clean-living, goodnatured fellows, and they went with Harry in the comfortable belief that his home would not contain for them any element of surprise.

In the dining-room at No. 14 Parkside, Mr. and Mrs. King were preparing, leisurely fashion, to go upstairs. Mrs. King had folded and put aside her work; Mr. King had stacked his ledgers on the cupboard to left of the fireplace. But they were in no hurry, for Richard, a slim, handsome figure in his thin overcoat and patent-leather boots, was regaling them with an account of his

evening at the vicarage. Mr. King regarded the Archdeacon with unfeigned respect, but it amused him to hear Richard call him, with affectionate tolerance, "an old windbag."

"And Miss Margerison?" asked his mother.

But if Richard could see clearly where the father was concerned, he had not the same perspicacity when the object was feminine and young. "She's getting up a penny reading. They need money for the infants' Christmas treat, and she wants me to help her."

"And you will?"

"Well - I've nothing much to do."

"How will you help?" asked Mrs. King.

"I'll sing one or two songs — she plays accompaniments rather nicely — and I'll get some of the fellows to come

over. By the bye, you'll have to turn up."

"Oh, we will, my boy — we'll all come," said the father, and Mrs. King nodded. She would like to see Richard — Richard in evening dress, so slim, so elegant, so handsome — stand upon a platform and sing. She would not applaud but she would listen to the applause of others, and it would be to her like rain falling softly on dry earth.

"Oh, yes," she said, "I'll come."

From the hall was wafted the sound of an opening door, of boots being rubbed on the mat, of voices.

"It's Henry," said Mr. King, "and he has some one with him! He ought to know better than to bring people

in at this time of night."

"I expect it's only Jack Tremaine," said Richard easily. "Well, mother, I'm hungry; they don't give you much to eat at the vicarage. I'll cut myself some bread and cheese. Do you know if that Bass has come?"

Mr. King looked uneasy. "I don't like your having to drink beer. I don't think the doctor should have

ordered it. We never have had any in the house before. . . ."

"Don't you worry, dad. It will be all right." He laid his hand affectionately for a moment on his father's shoulder and was passing on when the door opened and Harry, followed by the pugilists, came into the room.

"I've brought Mr. O'Gorman and Mr. Hobbs to see you, father," he said.

The men advanced genially, but only Richard, smothering a sudden chuckling conviction that this was "a rare old game," realized who and what they were. He came to the rescue.

"The star turn!" he said. "Father, Mr. O'Gorman and Mr. Hobbs have been giving an exhibition of boxing at the gymnasium display." He turned to the boxers, prepossessing them with his bright, friendly smile. "That's so, isn't it?"

"Yes, we have been having a bit of a mix-up," said Hobbs; and Mr. King realized, with a sinking feeling at the pit of his stomach, that he was face to face with men of a kind he had all his life abhorred - men of strange powers, prize-fighters. He looked at them covertly while Richard talked of having seen O'Gorman "get a welldeserved verdict at Oxford the previous year," and to his mind they resembled nothing so much as a pair of Bengal tigers. About them was a general atmosphere of brightness and stripiness: their check overcoats were warmly toned, the waistcoats and neckerchiefs revealed when the men seated themselves were different shades of colour from tawny red to yellow, and against the background of faded leather and dull wall-paper they stood out sharply. Mr. King cursed the ever-active mind of his youngest son. What had Henry been thinking of to bring such men home with him?

"Fine evening, sir," said Hobbs, turning to his host, and Mr. King, smoothing his beard with a nervous hand, stared at the pugilist's thickened car and "hoped that the display had gone well."

"House was crammed, there wasn't standing room," boasted Harry. "The hospital will do well out of us this year. I persuaded Mr. Hobbs and Mr. O'Gorman to come back with me, because I knew you would like to meet them."

"Delighted," said Mr. King, trying not to look unhappy. He must be careful not to irritate the tigers, not to say anything to which they could take exception; but afterwards — afterwards he would settle with Henry.

"I knew you had never met any one who was in the

ring."

"I have not had that pleasure," and Mr. King shifted his gaze from Hobbs's thickened ear to the S in the middle of O'Gorman's otherwise handsome face, the S that did duty as a nose.

"So I seized the opportunity."

"Quite - er - quite right, my boy."

"Hope I see you well?" said O'Gorman agreeably. King's father was a funny old josser. Why hadn't he been at the display? Perhaps he fancied he had a cold in the head. That sort of person thought a cold mattered.

"I find this weather a little trying," said Mr. King.

"That accounts for it," and Mr. King wondered what it accounted for but didn't like to ask. "Nice little hall."

"Very nice."

"And your youngster gave us some good sport." In all probability the old geezer was dying to know whether his bantling had pulled it off. "Henry did?" Mr. King tried to simulate the interest he was far from feeling.

"Yes; treated the other chap to an out-and-out boxing-lesson, he did. Mudford did bravely but it only got him a pummelling. Your lad was sticking in, first his left, then his right; sticking them in any liddle old place he wanted."

"I—er—" began Mr. King. He knew that he ought to stand up for his principles, and yet the tigers were smiling at him so amiably that it was a temptation to hold his peace.

"Mudford was knocked out in the ninth round," continued O'Gorman. "He was crossed on the point — forgot to lift his left arm to fend it off, y'know, and they counted him out."

"Ay," said Hobbs, who was a heavier and shorter man with less to say for himself, "but he got the referee's goat before that."

"Goat?" said the bewildered Mr. King.

"Using his head," explained Hobbs. "Either he don't know the rules or he don't think they should apply to him. Referee thought they did, though."

"You won't know him tomorrow, father," said Harry

cheerfully.

Mr. King, struggling with himself, cleared his throat. Though the tigers ate him, it was his duty, with a last dying effort, to make his position clear.

"I should say," said Hobbs critically, "that Mudford

lushes -- "

"He can neck it by the half-bottle," agreed

Harry.

"He drinks!" said Mr. King severely, and, to his surprise, found that the tigers were with him in reprobating drink.

"It's done in many a good man," said Hobbs, shaking a square, prematurely grey head.

Mr. King pulled himself together. The tigers were not

altogether tigerish and he must make his stand.

"I'm sorry my son should have taken part in this boxing contest," he said. He could not look at the men, for his heart was beating quickly and he was afraid. Instead, he studied the floral groups on the new green carpet and wondered anxiously what would happen next.

"Ah," said O'Gorman, "I'm with you there. The young blighter's too good for a one-horse place like this. Fighting is an instinct with your boy. He fights with passion, he does, and the boxer who does that will draw

most any man's bluff. He'll go far."
"He's going to be an engineer."

"Nothing like having a trade to fall back on," agreed the Cornishman. "But, bar accidents, you've no call to worry about him."

Richard, though he had been enjoying the situation, thought it time to intervene. "I expect you'd like a

drink," he said, rising.

Mr. King looked from Richard to his youngest son. It was on the tip of his tongue to say, "Not in my house."

"I could do with a wet," said Hobbs, getting to his feet; and Mr. King, disapproving, yet saw a gleam of light. They would drink Richard's beer and then they would go.

"Come along." He led the way, and the trusting tigers followed where he led. They were glad to leave the old bloke behind; he wasn't sporty — not really what you

would call sporty.

"I don't believe," said Hobbs when they were sitting comfortably about the kitchen table with clays and beer, "that your guv'nor has ever seen a slam." "That's going rather far," returned Richard with a half-smile, and they agreed that perhaps it was. Even Mr. King had been young once, and young fellows generally had a look round before they settled down. They might not say much about it afterwards, but that was neither here nor there.

VI

Mr. and Mrs. King, with the dining-room door shut between themselves and the tigers, waited until returning steps told them that the men were leaving.

"Now we can go to bed," said Mr. King a little peevishly, and opened the door. Harry, after saying good-bye to the pugilists, was crossing the hall; he also was on his

way to bed.

"Well," said Mr. King irritably, "well, Henry, I can't

congratulate you on your friends."

Until that moment Harry had not known how thoroughly disgruntled he had been by the behaviour of his family. Their absence from the display; their lack of interest in his performance, his success; their disapproval, were so many counts against them. At the back of his mind discontent with them had been smouldering. His father's words, captious and unsympathetic, proved the little wind that blows the embers into a flame. Suddenly, to his surprise and that of Mr. King, he blazed into wild wrath. Accusation and reproach tumbled from his lips. "But this is the end. I'll stand no more of it. You've made a stranger of me. You've done it."

"But — Henry —" stammered the amazed Mr. King.
"I've had enough of it and I'm going now — at once."
He swung about, snatched his hat from its peg, and, be-

fore any one could move to prevent him, had opened the front door and was gone.

The sound of the banging door reverberated through the midnight house. Mr. King, aghast, looked at his wife.

"You've done it now," said the snake he had warmed in his bosom.

"But," said Mr. King, opening his hands in a deprecatory gesture, "I — I've done nothing."

Chapter XII

I

ON'T you think you'd better grow up a bit before you try to annex other people's dances?" said a young voice insolently.

The occasion was a dance at the Allens' house, Susie's first grown-up dance; and the speaker a tall, red-headed cousin, to whom Harry King's reputation was unknown. Susie had promised to dance No. 20 with her old friend, but this was an extra.

"Ewen, how can you!"

Harry's hand had clenched, his body had made a swift, almost imperceptible forward movement, and she had seen it. She was between the two men, but you could never be sure of Harry, of what he would do, of where he would be. His face, as she surveyed it hastily, showed grey above a shirt collar that was a size too small. Susie misdoubted that greyness. He was angry. Perhaps, though Ewen was so big — six foot three in his stockings — Harry would hit him.

If he hit him it would mean a row, a row at her party. She thrilled, but at the same time looked round for Ralph. It would not do to have a row. Some of her mother's friends were present, and she must think of their middle-aged susceptibilities. If only Ralph were not dancing! He was so sensible, such a man of the world, he always knew how to deal with a situation; but Ralph, in his short blue coat and his gold lace, was waltzing with all the jolly abandon of a sailor. He went past without

196

a glance for his sister, without a thought that she might be in need of him.

She had known the men disliked each other. From the beginning of the evening their animus had been evident, and it was because of her.

How wonderful that she would have this power over them! Harry and then her cousin and, yes, Bobbie Chapman, but Bobbie didn't count. It was exciting, it went to your head; it was the most delightful thing in the world. Yet it was difficult to believe you really had it, that it wasn't all play-acting and make-believe. She had longed to put it to the test but she had not done so. She had been a good girl, she had remembered "the glove in the lion's den" and other stories of that kind, and she had behaved as if neither Harry nor Ewen were more to her than any other young man; yet this had come of it.

"Harry!" she said entreatingly, and stretched a slim, girlish arm between the men.

Harry did not hear, did not see her; rage had swept her out of his thoughts. He saw nothing but the look on the big Australian's face, felt nothing but a rush of anger. He must wipe the smile off that face. A hateful face, the sort of face a man wanted to hit. Nasmyth had crossed Harry's path more than once that evening, and each time Harry's instinctive dislike of him had grown. The mistake over the dances — and Harry was certain he was in the right — had brought matters to a head.

Harry's answer to the insult would be made with his hands. Anger was pushing him towards a blow, but outside the main stream of his consciousness was a retarding self that held on to him, held him back. Not now and not here. . . .

His rage must culminate in an explosion, but the explosion might be delayed. The retarding self was gaining

power; it was helped by the strangeness of the room, by the people present, by the atmosphere of cheerful festivity. He must not make a scene, he would not.

"I'll meet you outside," he said after a pregnant pause.

The Australian looked at him uncomprehendingly. Might was right, and little chaps must be taught their place. As to meeting him outside, that, of course, was hot air. The fellow wanted to save his face.

"Come on, Susie," he said.

Susie was only anxious to get away before the storm broke. She glanced back with an apologetic "It is really his dance, Harry — ours is the next," and allowed herself to be carried off.

Harry stood for a moment where they had left him. His wild desire had steadied into purpose. He would wait as long as was necessary.

"Grow a bit?" He would show Nasmyth that height was unimportant, that this intensity of feeling, this passion, the something that put a sting into blows, that gave a man dominance, had nothing to do with size. He would do more than that: he would knock him out. The man had dared to belittle him, to make him of no account. He had belittled him before a woman, and there was only one way in which to wipe off the insult.

Avoiding, without consciousness of them, the gyrating couples, he walked towards the door. It was the only door of the room, and out of it Ewen Nasmyth must eventually come. Harry would wait for him in the hall.

June nights are short and it was already late. Some of the guests had left and others were preparing to go. Harry found his one-time henchman, Jack Tremaine, waiting by the hall door.

[&]quot;I want you."

On leaving home Harry had taken a room in the house of Tremaine's widowed mother, and the fact of their friendship accounted for the extension of Mrs. Allen's invitation to the young engineer.

"I'm waiting for Bet."

"Oh, let Bet alone for once; I want you." He was willing that Tremaine should become a member of his family, but the long courtship must not be allowed to interfere with his arrangements.

"I promised Mrs. King I'd see her home."

Bet, a fleecy white wrap round her vivid face, came out of the cloakroom. To Harry she was not a sonsie young woman but an obstacle.

"Why are you going so early?"

"Early? Why, it's gone three, and mother said I wasn't to stay until the end; it doesn't look well." Why were Harry's eyes so fierce? What had happened?

"Look?" His words came tumbling. "You are always thinking of appearances. Who do you suppose is

noticing how long you stay or when you go?"

The stimulus of a happy evening kept her sweet. What was the matter? Some trifle! Anyway, it didn't concern her. All she wanted was to go into the white night with Jack, to walk with him under the paling stars and listen to the queer ups and downs of his voice, to the accent that grew more marked when he forgot himself, as he did when alone with her.

"I want Jack - want him to stay here."

"Oh, no, Henry!" Throughout the happy evening she had been looking forward to their walk home.

"It's only a step from here to our house."

"But mother said . . . "

"You run along by yourself." He took her lightly

by the shoulders, and before her resistance had become definite or Tremaine, big and slow, could come to the rescue, he had her across the threshold.

"I've an account to settle," he vouchsafed, as he shut the door between the disappointed man and maid. "I

may want your help."

"Oh, of course, if that's it!" For a moment he had felt ugly. It was outrageous that Harry should prevent him taking Bet home; but if there were need of his services, real need, it was a different matter. He thought of Bet walking buoyantly away, her blue skirts lifted from the dust of the road. His heart followed her. But for him and her remained all the nights in all the years till life should end; he might spare this to Harry—not very willingly, but he would.

Mrs. Allen, crossing the hall on the arm of Tom Drummond, the man she was going to marry, caught sight of

the two young men.

"Not dancing, Harry?" That so vigorous a performer should be standing idle struck her as odd. He looked, too, as if something had disagreed with him. His thick eyebrows were meeting in an obtuse angle over narrowed eyelids; it gave him a Mongolian look. She had seen the same look on Mr. King's face, had learnt to regard it as a storm-signal. It was extraordinary, she thought, how like Harry was to his father.

The quick shuttle of her thoughts flew back. The young man's attitude was tense and Tremaine was looking uneasy. What had happened? Harry was good-natured, easy. The consciousness of his unusual strength made him careful. There were times, however, when the best-tempered man takes offence. If Susie, for instance, had shown a ballroom preference . . .

One could not deny that Harry was a rough diamond.

Where had he bought his evening suit? And had he got it ready-made? It looked ready-made; it rucked at the neck and was too tight across the shoulders. And who was responsible for his shirts? That which he was wearing bulged at one side. And oh, if he hadn't put grease on his hair! The crest of strong curls that had been so characteristic was gone; his hair was sleeked back—it shone, softly, greasily. . . .

A red curtain hung across the front door, framing the two young men. In spite of Harry's ill-fitting suit, badly laundered shirt and murdered locks, there was something about his face . . . Mrs. Allen perceived it, considered it. One had to distinguish between the unimportant and this something.

Not that she wanted Susie to take him seriously. The girl was only seventeen. Time enough.

"I am waiting for some one."

If he were waiting for a dancing partner, the hall door was hardly the place; but Mrs. Allen saw she was not to be taken into his confidence.

"By the bye," she said, beginning to move away, "there is that horoscope. Did you remember to ask Mrs. King what time of the day you were born?"

In the ballroom the music had ceased, and some couples were seeking the cooler atmosphere of the stairs. "I don't think so," said Harry vaguely. His eyes were on the bright oblong of the door. At any moment Nasmyth's red head might show above the stream.

Jack Tremaine turned a surprised face upon his friend.

"Why, you asked Mrs. King last night, I heard you, and she said — she said —" he could not remember, "I think she said Harry was born October 20."

"Harry," said Mrs. Allen dryly, "must know the date of his own birthday."

- "I was born October 17, 1874."
- "Yes, and your mother said I have it now at halfpast three in the afternoon. She said you came in a hurry and have been in a hurry ever since."
- "Thank you." Mrs. Allen made a mental note of hour and day. "It is some time since I've drawn a horoscope. I got the ephemeris yesterday but could not do anything more until I knew the time."
- "Do you believe in horoscopes?" Tremaine, in the dark as to Harry's wishes and expectations, saw no harm in continuing the conversation. Mrs. Allen was a pleasant lady, he thought her quite beautiful, and it was dull work standing by till Harry should make a move.
- "I? Oh, I neither believe nor disbelieve. They are drawn according to certain empirical rules, and no doubt those rules were framed by shrewd observers who had noticed that, given certain conditions, certain results follow. I find it surprising how often horoscopes hit the nail on the head. Still, they don't cover much ground. . . . "

The opening bars of "Sir Roger de Coverly" smote on Harry's consciousness. Not much longer now. He heard Mr. Drummond's "You promised to dance this with me, Ursula," and was relieved to see Mrs. Allen led away. She paused, however, on the threshold of the ballroom, paused to glance back at them.

"Won't you let me find you partners for this? It's the last, you know," and if Harry had not intervened, Tremaine would have gone.

"All right, then," he said, yielding to the pressure of Harry's hand, "but just let me look in." He moved to the door, and his glance embraced the large bright room. Long rows of men and girls were forming down the sides; but there appeared to be a hitch. Susic Allen was sitting partnerless by the piano; she seemed to be waiting. He

saw Bobbie Chapman go up to her, saw her rise reluctantly and, with a glance towards the door, take her place among the others.

Susie was asking herself whether Harry were offended, and Harry, waiting impatiently until the dance should be over, had forgotten.

"Another drink and I must be off," said Nasmyth to

young Allen as the music stopped.

"Where are you sleeping?"

"At the 'Crown.'" They turned into the room, now deserted, in which light refreshments had been served, and

there Harry came up with them.

"You have to settle with me," he said, and his words, long withheld, fell like tiny blows. He was not offensive, but the look of him, the sound of his voice, was enough for Allen.

"Hullo, what's up?"

Nasmyth, having done with Harry, found the fact of his continued existence surprising. As for settling with him, what did he mean? "Oh, come . . ."

"You have kept me waiting."

"My dear chap, the thing is over and done with." He was in no mood for scrapping. "Here, Allen, make this chap hear reason."

"Don't barge in, Allen; it's nothing to do with you."

"This is my mother's house."

"Very well, then, we'll go outside."

"But, confound it all," said Nasmyth, " you can't make

a serious quarrel out of it!"

"I'm in dead earnest." With his open hand Harry struck him smartly across the cheek, and the impact of those four hard fingers left a red and angry mark. "Now will you fight?"

Allen stepped between the men. "Outside," he said,

"outside. Here, the garden is this way." Drawing back a curtain, he threw open the French window. "Why, it's daylight!"

The garden lay before them, deserted and dewy—a stretch of lawn, paths that wound among beds of roses and under nut- and apple-trees. "The drying-ground, I think," he said shortly, "it is farther away." He led them to a summer-house white-walled and thatched. "Tremaine, your man can have the tool-shed. We'll join you on the grass."

The big Australian was very angry. At the end of an evening's entertainment why should he have to teach a little hop-o'-my-thumb manners? First the chap tried to do him out of one of his dances, then he made himself offensive. Wanted a lesson, did he? Well, it was coming to him. Nasmyth put a hand to his smarting cheek.

"I suppose you can box, Ewen?"

"A bit!" He could box more than a bit. "You got a set of gloves?"

"King doesn't mean fighting with gloves."

"Doesn't he?" He found this statement puzzling. "Can he fight?"

"The people about here think he can." Ralph, a naval officer, had not spent much time in the railway town; he had not had the good fortune to see Harry box. On the other hand, he had known him all his life, while Ewen Nasmyth, though his cousin, was almost a stranger. Ewen was finely built; he certainly looked as if he could do Harry in. For the honour of the family Ralph hoped that he might.

"Light weight?"

"No, heavy."

"You don't say?"

"Scales at thirteen stone. He's an amateur, of course, but they tell me he's pretty good."

Nasmyth did not doubt the issue. Six-foot-three with science and some experience in the ring, against provincial five-foot-six. But to give the little chap a thrashing might take longer than he had supposed.

Allen led the way to the drying-ground, and at the same moment Harry, followed by Tremaine, emerged from the earthy obscurity of the tool-shed. The Australian had not bothered to remove more than his outer garments, but Harry was naked to the waist.

"Fancies himself!" said Nasmyth, and, throwing back his head, swaggered across the grass. "Look here," he cried in his loud, overbearing voice, as the two parties met between the posts of the drying-lines, "this is a boxing match. We aren't fighting for our lives."

The sun's rim was over the edge of the world. The yellow light fell on Harry's massively boned face, on the narrow eyes and implacable mouth. "I shall kill you if I can."

Nasmyth experienced a slight shock, but he had met other men who tried to scare their opponents by their ferocity. "With your mouth?" he asked.

He was not prepared for what followed. Ralph had told him that Harry was quick, but his quickness proved phenomenal. It was as if a whirlwind had broken loose. The Australian, like most heavy-weights, was slow, and he soon found it was all he could do to keep going. At the end of the first round his right eye was badly gashed and he was bleeding from the lips and nose. When Ralph, the self-appointed referee, called "Time," he leaned up against a drying-post feeling dazed. The little chap—but somehow, seen without those countrified evening clothes

he did not look small, only short; and that chest! Nasmyth was still angry, but not altogether with Harry. What had they quarrelled about? He couldn't remember. Oh, yes — Susie. Curse Susie! she wasn't worth this — this —

What was it the fellow had said? He had threatened him — threatened to kill him? Mere words, of course, but those blows of his, there was a sting in them, he hit to hurt, and his eyes — they were hard, revoltingly hard, hard as the hobs of hell.

Time was up and Harry had started anew on his relentless attack. Nasmyth had some skill at stalling, but the swift pace, coupled with the constant pummelling began to tell on him.

To the onlookers it had been evident from the first that he was out-boxed, evident too that Harry was fighting not merely to win. When Nasmyth got back to his corner at the end of the round the conviction had been forced upon him that King had meant what he said.

He was out to do him serious bodily injury. Unsportsmanlike — but words had no power with such as King. "I will kill you if I can," he had said.

Amazing! The chap had meant it. For a thoughtless phrase of an hour ago the fellow was out to kill, to kill not just anybody, but Ewen Nasmyth. His blows meant that, and they were the utterance of his will.

Nasmyth stared about him — at the morning sky, the quiet garden, the low fruit-laden trees. Impossible that here, in nineteenth-century civilized England, he should be up against it; he must be dreaming.

Into his mind slipped a memory of the quay-side at Sydney. A man had been ill-treating a dog — his dog, and he could do as he pleased with it; but Curzon, Dandy Curzon the Irish welter-weight, had said "No." They

had fought, and Curzon had killed his man — killed him out there in the road, killed him with his hands. He had been sentenced to penal servitude for life, but what was the good of that? The man was dead.

These things happened.

They happened to other men, it could not be that they were happening to him, that the lust to slay had looked at him out of King's eyes? It — it was all bunkum.

What was Ralph saying?

Time was not up? Not yet, surely not? Well then, he must go. And King? The brute was as fresh as paint! Nasmyth fell into wild, childish fury. The law would avenge him. In this case there were no extenuating circumstances. Men would hang King — hang him, hang him, hang him. . . .

Yes, but before that . . .

A man has only one life.

King must be mad. Why didn't the others see it and interfere?

His - life.

He could preserve it if he would pay the price. What

did the price matter?

He was lying on the ground. King was standing over him. The blow had not been a knock-out — a left-arm jolt to the point, delivered when he was going away. It had hardly touched him — still, he preferred to lie where he was.

"Come on, you beggar. Get up. Let's get on with it.

Fight!"

Nasmyth threw his arm over his face. As long as he lay

there he was safe.

"Get up and I'll jab you again. What, you don't want any more? No fight in a big chap like you? What an old Mary Ann 'tis."

Tremaine came up to them. "He's down and out."

But Harry waited, waited hopefully. His anger was mellowing into contempt, but still he hoped; and as long as he waited the Australian lay where he had fallen.

"It's domino," said the naval officer, "no guts."

The fight was over. As Nasmyth, walking groggily, was led away, the corner of a blind that had been curled back from an upper room fell into place. Once more Susie had been looking out of a window at Harry.

Her feet and hands and the tip of her little nose were cold, for she was insufficiently clad in a nightgown; and it may have been to warm herself that she pirouetted across the floor to her bed. It may have been, but as she danced she sang in a small voice, sang very softly, for her mother slept in the next room.

"He did it for me, Harry did, for me - for me - for

me!"

II

"Phineas used to say marriage was Nature's way," remarked Mrs. Allen, "of bringing each generation back to a sane mediocrity."

"Levelling up and down," said Mr. Drummond, who

was contentedly puffing at his pipe.

Mrs. Allen had been making calculations, first in black ink, then in red, on the ephemeris of Harry King's horoscope. She laid the penholder in the old Indian dish and leaned both elbows on the table. She was tired and wanted the refreshment of idle talk.

"I suppose that is why clever men marry congenital idiots," she said, speaking as one who had suffered, "and strong men —" she paused, her glance seeking the horoscope, "strong men select delicate women. Nature abhors the superhuman."

"Well, I should say so."

"Ah, but not only in brains, in every walk of life. Now this young King is unusual. . . . "

"Forearm of an ox!"

"Oxes — I mean oxen — don't have forearms; but he is one in a thousand."

"He has got to prove that he is."

"He'll do that all right, and meanwhile I say it and, for the sake of argument, you agree with me."

" Have it your own way."

"Very well. Now what will happen? When he marries he'll choose a woman as much below the average in constitution — health, you know — as he's above it. Nature will see to it that he does. She doesn't want a race of kings, she wants average people — ordinary, everyday men and women."

"But he seems to like Susie and she's all right."

"He won't marry Susie."

"Why shouldn't he?"

"He's running after her," said Mrs. Allen thoughtfully, "because other people are and he can't see a man running without wanting to race him. I don't think he really cares for Susie, not," she smiled at him and the lines of her face took an upward curve, "not as I do, Tom."

"You're a peach," he said irrelevantly.

"I don't want him to; I don't think he would make her happy." She took up the horoscope. "It isn't that I believe in this, but that it coincides with what I have observed. Since he began to come here, Tom, I've been watching him —"

"Trust you!"

"At the time of his birth," she referred to her calculations, "the sun occupied Libra and the moon was in Cap-

ricorn, while Neptune was in the ascendant and Jupiter ruled the mid-heaven."

Mr. Drummond waited contentedly. Behind this ver-

biage lay the gold of Ursula's conclusions.

"And that means Neptune is his ruling planet. Neptune is elusive, it brings the unusual and unexpected into the lives of those it rules. I have noticed that Harry thinks one thing today and one tomorrow, that his mind is restless and carries him along at a tremendous rate, that he lives in the moment; and this explains it." She was not altogether in earnest over this matter of the horoscope, did not want him to think she was, still it was interesting that it should confirm her observations. "Neptune is the planet of fitfulness and impermanence, of little weaknesses, petty meannesses—"

Her Tom showed a placid interest. "And King?"

"He is a nomad, here today and gone tomorrow. According to this there is no permanence in his life and never will be."

"Humph!"

"The sun is passing through Scorpio, and that means toil and struggle. He'll roam the world on one adventure after another."

"Not a bad sort of life."

"A life of perpetual struggle - oh, Tom!"

"A life of adventure, my dear!"

"What a boy you are still!" They exchanged a look and she returned to the subject occupying her thoughts.

"His circumstances ought to improve about 1910, and then he will be, let me see, how old? He was born in "74."

"Thirty-six."

"Until then he won't be able to keep a wife," and she smiled, well pleased.

"That isn't to say he won't have one."

"N-no; still I hope, if he does, that it won't be Susie. According to this, it won't. The sign Virgo is on the cusp of his house of marriage, which shows that his affinity has her Sun posited in that sign and that her birthday should be between August 21 and September 21 — Susie was born in March."

"I'm afraid you attach some weight to these prognostications." He knocked out his pipe on the edge of the fender.

"You mean I believe what I want to believe? But belief with me is a thing of layers. Under the layers is a depth of scepticism that goes, as the nigger said, 'all de way down.' There is just one thing about this horoscope . . ."

"I want," said Tom mildly, "I want you to come round

the garden with me."

"What an out-of-doors man you are. One moment, dear."

" Well?"

"It's curious that, given what we know of Harry, his knack of creating a situation wherever he goes — you remember poor Ewen? — that the horoscope should predict for him a life of cataclysms, great success and heavy reverses, alternate poverty and riches."

"Yes, it is certainly odd."

"I haven't faked it in any way. Any one given these data, who knew how to calculate a horoscope would give a similar reading."

"It may not come true."

"And yet it may, Mr. Doubting Thomas. Anyway the years between forty-five and fifty-five should be crucial. With Jupiter, beneficent old Jupiter, ruling the mid-heaven conjunct with the Sun, there is no limit; he may rise to any height, do anything."

"And all's well that ends well. Now, my dear, let's go for a stroll round the garden."

In the round white summer-house were casements filled with diamond panes, casements that opened outward; and the couple, approaching it by way of the shrubbery, caught sight of something small and black that was perched on the sill.

"Look — there is one of Susie's bantams," said Mrs. Allen.

"And where the bantams are . . . "

A sound of hammering came from the summer-house. "And where Susie is . . . " amended Mr. Drummond with a smile.

Through the glass door of the summer-house, the interior, lined with brown wood, showed darkly clear. Harry King, using the iron table as a bench, was mending a chicken-coop, while Susie, in the low chair that had been hers since nursery days, sat looking on. She watched but her little hands were busy. She was crocheting, with fine cotton and a slim, active needle, a strip of lace. Upstairs in a drawer - her bottom drawer - she had other strips, some wide, some narrow, but all fine. She spent the long, dreamy leisure of her girlhood crocheting this lace. When she became engaged her mother would supply her with material as fine, with delicate cambric, linen of which the threads could hardly be seen, and she would turn them into clothing, ornament them with cobwebby crochet - with some of it, but not with the filmiest rolls, not with the very lightest and softest, no. And when she was married she would carry with her to her husband's house these miracles of stitchery, these white garments which were embodied hope; and under them, at the very bottom of her trunk and wrapped in tissue-paper, would lie the soft reserve of lace. No one would speak to her

about it, she would not even speak of it to herself; but she would know it was there.

Susie, from her low cane-chair, was looking across the iron table, looking at Harry. To do so was a satisfactory way of passing the time. She liked to look at his black hair — hair so strong that it could not lie down unless he tamed it with brilliantine. She liked the oblique setting of his eyes. Other people's eyes did not go up at the outer corners. Harry's, too, were so bright, so intent. She had been looking at him for quite a long time and never once had he met her glance.

If only he had not been going to India! She saw it as a place full of wild beasts and mutinous blacks. Why couldn't he be content to stay in England? He had told her he wanted scope; but he was doing well. Mr. Drummond had said that for his age Harry was doing unusually well. Why must he go rushing off to the ends of the earth?

"It is a pity you have only got these two hens," said Harry, as the bantam which had been enjoying a dustbath under the fixed wooden seat, got up and shook her feathers. "You want a cock."

"Why do I?" said Susie.

"Er —" Harry found the explanation beyond him, "people never have hens without cocks, you know."

"They don't seem to." Susie considered the matter.

"But the little hens seem happy as they are, and cocks are so quarrelsome. If I got one he might ill-treat them."

"He wouldn't." Harry twisted a screw into place. It seemed a pity there should never be any downy little chicks. He was sorry for the spinster hens. "It's dull for them," he said at last. "You'd find it dull, Susie, if no young men ever came to the house."

Susie looked at him with astonished, wide-open eyes. "But chickens aren't like us."

"Why not?"

She was puzzled. There was, of course, the difference that she was a human being and the bantams were only birds, but that was self-evident. "Well, they can't talk," she said, and warmed a little. "People — men, you know — come here in order to sit and talk to us."

"And is that all?"

"Ye-es," she said a little uncertainly, "that — that's all. . . . "

Harry gave it up. It was all right that girls like Susie should be ignorant, just as it was that they should be chaperoned; it set them apart, was like the bloom on the grape. The winds must not blow on them, nor the rain fall. He admired this guarded ignorance, but felt that from one point of view—that of companionship—it left something to be desired. Still, you mustn't expect too much.

Mrs. Allen opened the summer-house door. "I've finished your horoscope, Harry. You'll find it on the blotter in the morning-room."

He paused, screwdriver in hand, and thanked her. "What do you make of it?" he asked eagerly. This was interesting; it concerned Harry King.

"That you are a rover, that change is the breath of life to you."

" Ah!"

"That you will roll all round the habitable globe, that you will never settle down for long." She became aware of Susie's anxious eyes and changed the subject: "When are you going to London?"

"As soon as I can get my clothes — and that reminds

me, I'm due at the tailor's." He began to clear up the accumulation of tools and wood.

"You haven't finished the coop," said Susie plaintively.
"I'll do it tomorrow."

She went with him through the house, open, back and front, to the warm June air, and though he was in a hurry, he did not forget the horoscope. Mrs. Allen was a good sort. It was difficult to impress some people — notably his brothers and sisters — but she seemed to realize that he was more than just one young man among many, that he would do — what? He did not yet know. Well, no matter. The world was big and the future was big; it lay before him like a cake, he had only to choose where he would cut.

He congratulated himself on having drawn out his savings and ordered himself a suit of clothes, the best procurable in the railway town. If the black morning coat and light trousers did not obtain for him the berth on the East India Railway that he was after — but they would.

He went swiftly along the quiet roads. A sleepy old place — the very air was stagnant! He must get out of it.

He would not come back until his name was on every-body's lips, until he was rich and famous, until a grateful country had recognized how much it owed to him. What price Richard when he was Sir Henry? His father, too. They would all be proud of him. He had not been able to take scholarships, he had not gone into the Civil Service, but when England had been in need of help he had been ready. "Everything I have and am."

He had saved his country.

His name would be written on the rolls of fame; it would be handed down from generation to generation.

"Born in this town but his greatest work was done in India and the colonies."

To his surprise, he was already at the tailor's shop. He walked in, and dreams of greatness hung about the trying on of the new clothes. He had no fault to find with cut or fit — indeed they were almost worthy. He stood a moment looking at himself in the tailor's long glass. Those who had the making of desirable appointments would never be able to harden their hearts against such admirable clothes.

"You will let me send these for you?" The cutter, the fitter, Mr. Sykes himself, had gathered to view this triumph of their art.

"Thanks, I'll wear them."

He would saunter through the streets wearing them; he would gather, as the Children of Israel gathered manna, the comments of his acquaintances, their surprise, their curiosity. "What's King up to now?" But they should not know, not until after he had pulled it off.

He carried an impassive face. He hardly noticed his acquaintances; he was preoccupied, absorbed. He, as it were, kept the blinds down so that no man or woman of them should see the grinning elf, who, inside, was turning somersaults and standing on his head and sticking his tongue into his cheek.

"Ain't 'ee a bloomin' torf!"

"Not much 'Rough 'Un' about them togs!"

"That's the chap who put the kibosh on Sam Prickett. I lay he's up to something."

"Clothes do a lot for a man. Would you believe it,

that's Harry King!"

"Wonder where he's off to — garden-party at Buckingham Palace? I don't think."

Harry had been eighteen when he left home, he was now

twenty-four. At first Mr. King had been unwilling that he should live with the Tremaines — live anywhere except under the paternal roof. It did not look well; people might think —

For once, however, Mrs. King was on Harry's side. Eighteen years of him had not inured her to the surprises that his restless mind was for ever springing on those unfortunate enough to be in his neighbourhood, and she would be glad of a little peace.

"You don't mind my leaving home?" He expected her to raise an objection. She ought to mind.

But she was no more sentimental than he. "I don't think boys and girls should stop in the nest after they are grown up. Pretty business if they did. The old birds would never get any rest."

"You ought to miss me." He would give her another chance. After all — one's mother!

"Ay, and 'twill be a good miss."

She consented, however, to continue making and mending for him — "'till you get a woman of your own."

Harry had not been the first to leave home, for Richard, having entered the Civil Service, was already in Egypt. His had been the usual fate of the scholarship boy. Clever and charming, he would do well in a mediocre way — do well in his rabbit-run, be a useful servant. His mind had leaped along the beaten tracks; he would never force a way for himself, it had not even occurred to him that he should. Mr. King was developing, about the boy of whom he had been so proud, a sense of disappointment. Richard seemed to have come to an end; the Service had swallowed him, there was nothing more to happen. About James too — for the Codger was still the Codger: the company had ear-marked him as a useful servant and he would rise, he might even become the head of a depart-

ment. But if the one son had ceased to do sensational things, Mr. King knew the other would never attempt them.

"And in Egypt, Richard, how do you occupy your

time?"

"We play a good deal of tennis."

"Yes?"

"And we dine out a goodish bit. It's the usual round. And then, of course, there's the office."

Tennis and dinners and the office — but the office last! And that was the boy of whom he had expected so much.

Richard had risen in the world, his career at school and college had been distinguished. What was lacking?

Mr. King was a servant and Richard too. The father had hoped for something more, had hoped his boy would prove a master of men. Why was he, too, only a servant? Had it anything to do with his training? Did the public schools and universities only trim you and shape you to this end? He turned from the thought. If his god had feet of clay he would avert his eyes, he would not look.

But the feeling of dissatisfaction, though he denied it, was growing, and there remained only Harry: Harry, who had wasted the years that should have been devoted to study in idle amusement — football, boxing, and the like; Harry who his brothers said was a dark horse. Was it possible that Harry . . .?

From his daughters Mr. King had not expected much. He had sent them to an expensive finishing school, that to which the Misses Margerison had gone. He had hoped much from that conjunction. The girls' manners would be softened, they would make useful friends, their school-fellows would have brothers.

All that had come of it was that Richard had married Ethel Margerison,

A good thing in its way, a better if Ethel's tone could have affected Mab and Nancy.

Unfortunately, they voted her namby-pamby, a ninny! He did what he could. He brought home fellows from the office, the sort he hoped his daughters would marry; and the young men came once but not again. Bet had made her choice, she was engaged to Jack Tremaine; yes, Bet had sense. But Mab and Nancy said they could wait, they were not going to throw themselves away.

With his boys out in the world and his girls home from school, Mr. King's burthen had been lightened. He no longer worked all day and every evening. He had given up some of his secretarial appointments and was begin-

ning, vaguely, to think of retiring.

Harry came upon him in the study. "Bought these at a sale today," said Mr. King, indicating the books he was arranging. "As I've given up the technical schools

I shall want something to do in the evenings."

The books were bound in bright blue and had red edges. Harry saw with interest that they were an edition of Chambers's "Encyclopaedia." He also would read them. James and Richard talked of matters of which he was ignorant—of a person called Socrates, whose works Harry had not been able to borrow from the town library, and he had decided that when opportunity arose he would dig in and learn.

"Good biz," he said, and placed his silk hat on a chair.

"I'll take a volume back with me."

"Why, Henry!" Mr. King, straightening himself from the finished task, caught sight of the hat. "What's this?"

"This?" In the fresh interest Harry had forgotten his clothes. "Eh — oh, yes; as I'm going to apply for

a berth in the East India Railway I thought I'd better get some decent togs."

"In the East India Railway? This is the first I've heard of it."

"You didn't suppose, father, that I was going to stop on here?"

"Humph! Well, I hope if you get this job you'll stick to it. You've shifted about a bit since you were out of your articles."

"A man shouldn't stop too long in any one place; he is apt to get stale."

Mr. King had stayed a working lifetime with one firm and in one place. James would follow his example. James, ay, and Richard! Whence came the drop in Harry's blood that made him a wanderer? His mother's people had been farmers; they had lived for generations in the same parish, dust of it were they and unto its dust they had returned. Remained his own side of the family—his father. He had never been able to persuade the old man to talk of the past; it was too painful, he said. Mr. King did not even know for certain whence his father had come. Marcus King—a strange name Marcus, un-English. Was the grandfather with the un-English name and terrible memories responsible for Harry's queerness, for what made him different from the rest of the family?

For once the surprise Harry had sprung on him was not disagreeable. The girls had been "finished," so apparently had Richard, but not Harry. He was going abroad, going in search of — the one man called it success, the other adventure!

"I wonder what your mother will say?"

Mrs. King, her sewing on a small table at her side, was threading a needle. She looked up as the men came in from the study. "I thought for the moment you were Richard," she said.

Harry explained, and, getting up, she smoothed, with work-worn fingers, the collar of the new coat.

"Ah, Sykes made it? Yes, he made for Richard, but you haven't the figure."

Harry looked at her reproachfully. "It's always Richard with you."

She defended herself. "He'd less original sin than the rest of you." She meant that to her he had been more affectionate.

"If you wear those clothes," said Nancy, "I don't mind going for a walk with you on Sunday. You look quite decent."

"For once in your life," said Mab pertly.

"Thanks," Harry tossed back the ball, "but I don't take my sisters for walks. Get a man of your own."

"No difficulty about that," said Nancy, her colour a little heightened.

Remembering Socrates, he carried off the S volume of the encyclopaedia, and that evening after supper applied himself to study. But Socrates was a puzzling disappointment: an old chap who made a nuisance of himself by asking questions, a man who never did anything but talk. He had got on the nerves of those appointed to govern, and they had accused him of a beastly sort of corruption, the corruption of youth. Harry supposed that the authorities had known what they were about; yet Richard and James discussed this mouldy old chatter-box as if, in spite of time and death, he mattered. It was mystifying. He did not understand. Well, at any rate, he knew now who Socrates was. He turned the pages, and under "Steel" found matter more congenial.

On the following day he called at the head office of the company, and without much difficulty passed the outer defences and reached the sanctum. "It's the clothes," he told himself as he was ushered in.

The Presence was a white-haired man wearing horn-rimmed spectacles. When he took them off his eyes were a mild blue, but seen behind the glass they had a keener glint.

"Your business, Mr. King?" and Harry explained it.

"Your qualifications?"

Harry had done good work for the firm. "I have just finished putting in the lighting plant for Grove Station."

The Presence turned up an entry. "Yes," he said, "and . . .?"

Harry went into further details. He had worked at Ipswich, at Doncaster. He produced his papers and the old man examined them.

"It is not usual for people to apply for a post abroad. We prefer to choose for ourselves among the young men in our employ. We watch their work and select those we think suitable."

"I thought if I applied it might hasten matters."

"We like to send out men who are keen." But he distrusted overkeenness; it did not seem to him English. And he hesitated, ruffling the papers before him with long, thin fingers and considering, considering. "You know, of course, that it means making your home in India?"

"I am prepared for that?"

"If we appointed you, when should you be ready to start?"

Harry had often started at a moment's notice on some vessel bound on a short voyage. He had taken his holi-

days, learnt his geography, that way. "I am ready now." "Now?"

He stood up, balancing lightly, looking, as the Presence felt, ready to start at that instant for the ends of the earth. "If you wanted me to, I could go from here to the docks and sleep on board tonight."

He was irresistible and the old man smiled. "We should hardly be so inconsiderate as that. Let me see: this is June. A boat will be sailing on July 21. We shall send you out on her as —" he paused to correct his memory from a paper, "as assistant locomotive superintendent of the line. It rests —" he smiled again, "it quite evidently rests with you how quickly you rise; and India, to a man of alert mind and healthy body, affords great opportunities." His manner changed from the paternal to the businesslike. He was once more a man whose physical life was nearly at an end, whose personal life had ended long ago. "Anything you want to know they will tell you in the office. Good morning."

III

The morning-rooom at Rosemeads overlooked the gate and a space of tree-shadowed road; and the window, a sunlit window, was one of Susie's favourite haunts. She was sitting there the evening of Harry's successful raid on London; but she was not expecting him. If you expected people they did not come; the best way was to tell yourself they were busy, had not got back, had an appointment; then, at any moment, the contrary might happen.

Harry, walking up the road after he had electrified his family with the news —" It was the silk hat did it; they

realized I knew what was what "— saw her little head through the clear pane of glass and, though he was very full of himself, felt suddenly a little chilled, a little doubtful. He wanted to get out of England, to see new countries, try his luck; but he didn't, no, he didn't want to leave Susie behind.

She was a darling, a little piece of perfection, a jewel. He would have liked to pack her in cotton-wool and put her in his trunk and carry her off. She would be there for when he wanted to look at her, to play with her. He did not want her all the time, only when he was in the mood.

He couldn't do it, of course; girls were not bits of jewellery to be wrapped in cotton-wool and packed in a trinket-box and put at the bottom of a Saratoga trunk. Yet, if he did not take her, another would.

He saw her — surrounded! Bobbie Chapman — but, somehow, Bobbie didn't count; still, there were others. Frank Margerison was always making excuses to drop in, and there was Gage. Harry's thoughts circled about Gage. He was doing well; Drummond had lately made him manager of Golden Hill Quarry. He was in a position to marry and was the sort not to think of marriage until he had the brass. It was quite evident that he had begun to think, that he was thinking of Susie.

Harry's impulse was to swoop. Susie belonged to him. He wanted to drive off the others, to parade her as his. At the same time, he did not want to endanger his freedom. There were quite a number of things he meant to do in which Susie could have no part; he must do them, too.

"I've got it!" he cried up to her. He was in too great a hurry to go round by the door.

She pushed open the window. "The appointment? I'm so glad; at least, what — what does it mean?"

"I'm going to India!"

The gladness died out of her face. "Oh, Harry - soon?"

"In three weeks' time!"

The tears welled into her eyes; she did her best not to let them run over and fall. She stood, seeing him as a dark blurr, and struggling with herself. She must not cry, not now — but it had been so sudden!

Harry gripped the sill with his strong hand and pulled himself up. He had the feeling that he was repeating a forgotten experience. Once, long ago, he had grasped a stone roughness and climbed into a room. The action was familiar, but he could not remember what had gone before, what had followed, only that it was concerned with tears. He could not bear to see a girl cry. . . .

Susie had risen and was facing him. She was a little frightened, and on her soft face was a tell-tale smear. He put his arms round her and drew her close.

"Don't you want me to go, Susie?"

Hope shot into her heart. After all, perhaps he needn't go. "I don't. I don't."

His voice had sunk to a tender soundlessness. "Come

with me! Darling - come with me."

She hadn't thought of that as a possibility. The face she raised to his was troubled. India was so far away.

Her unwillingness acted on him as a spur. "I want you, darling."

"Do you, Harry, do you really?"

Protestations that she heard with a divided mind. Susie was a blossom, not a butterfly. She was rooted in English soil. "Are you going to stay in India, live there?"

He drew a picture of railroad life, of the openings for

a young fellow with ideas, of giddy heights to which that young fellow might rise. "Of course it will be our home."

And India as a home did not appeal to her island mind. "Snakes," she thought, "and black holes and natives!" Still there would be Harry. The railway town without Harry would be a dreary place. It was a choice of evils. In the end she allowed herself to be persuaded, and the Susie who sought her mother was a modestly happy little girl.

"Well, my bud?" said Mrs. Allen, who was sorting towels in the glorified cupboard she called a linen-room. When she heard what had happened she pushed the linen aside and sat down with Susie on an ottoman.

"You want to go out to India?"

"I want to go with Harry."

The mother guessed at the scene. If only she could have spread a maternal wing over her chick, a wing that would have beaten off the swooping marauder!

"It was because you didn't want him to go to India."

"He —" began Susie softly, and fell silent. She could not tell any one what Harry had said.

"Oh, I know. . . . " Mrs. Allen had listened to more than one tale of love.

Susie broke from her shyness to paint afresh Harry's picture of the Dependency, and while she talked her mother pondered the situation.

She must not be made unhappy, neither must she be allowed to turn a foolish promise into performance.

"Did you say he was sailing on the 21st, dear? Let me see: this is June 30. Only three weeks!" She paused on the awkward fact. Susie had common sense. Let the fact sink into her mind. "You are sure he could not go later, say in a month or two?"

"He wouldn't."

"All your things to get! Your underclothes, of course, must be hand-made. What a rush! Are you quite certain he couldn't wait?"

"How could he, mother?"

"If only," murmured Mrs. Allen, "you had been engaged to him for a little while! If only people had been told!"

"But, mother, he only thought of getting the smart clothes and asking those people in London for the berth last — last — the end of last month. He couldn't speak to me till he knew, and he only knew today!"

"Yes, dear, I see how it was; but it leaves so little

time."

"Surely, though," she was growing anxious, "surely

we can manage?"

"Well, let me think. We shall have to write to every-body and tell them; then we shall have to get your things—it's India, you know, and you can't go with any sort of a trousseau—and then there'll be the wedding. You'll

want a proper wedding. . . . "

"Ye-es." She must have the sort of wedding other girls had; must be married in white satin and a veil, must have bridesmaids and orange-blossoms and a cake. Her brothers, too — they must get leave of absence from their ships. She supposed that, as her father was dead, Ralph would give her away; and, of course, the uncles and aunts would come and there would be wedding presents and an "At home."

"I don't see how we can do it in the time."

"Oh, mother!"

"Well, dear, think of your frocks." She spoke at length on the frocks she meant Susie to have. It was soothing talk, it was like a hand passing again and again over a cat's fur.

"Don't you think," she said, when she judged the moment was come, the moment of acquiescence, "don't you think, Susie, that as the time is so short you had better let him go out and get some sort of a home ready for you? You could follow — in a month or two. . . ."

"Oh no, oh no!"

Mrs. Allen talked on. Susie must acquiesce. Those who loved her were not going to trust her to an unknown lover. "Time tryeth troth," and Harry must prove himself, prove that he was reliable. "A month or two later, dear, then you could go comfortably. It isn't so very long. . . ."

"I should hate travelling alone."

"We could easily find some one to chaperone you."

"If I didn't go with him — oh, mother, I do want to go."

"I know, dearest, I know, and I wish it were possible; but you see yourself . . ."

She did see. "Then - when?"

"I believe October is a good month in which to travel."

"October? And this is June?" She considered. "I could be ready by then?"

"If we work hard, dear."

"I shall enjoy making my things." The thought of the fine stitches she would set in fine materials was helpful. A delay of three months and she could go to Harry "all glorious within."

"We shan't have to scamp them."

"There is that." She got up from the ottoman. "Well," she said sadly, "I'll tell Harry what you say; but I'm afraid he'll be dreadfully disappointed."

IV

Harry, making his preparations for India, knew it to be of the first importance that he should take with him fighting-gloves and a set of boxing-gloves. He put them into the Saratoga trunk and stopped to think. What else would he require? Tools? Yes, tools would come in handy. He overhauled his possessions, then, unostentatiously, those of James. The desire-for constituting with Harry the right-to, he decided that several of James's tools were in reality his. He would take them, however, when there was no chance of their being reclaimed; the last evening would be soon enough.

Harry's "hookey" thumb was also in evidence, but more openly, when it came to a question of clothes. He hunted garments with the assiduity a dog puts into digging out a rabbit. He laid everybody under contribution, and was so heartily pleased with each addition to his belongings that it was difficult for people like Susie and Mrs. Allen to deny themselves the pleasure of giving. His sisters were less inclined to be generous.

"No, Henry, you can't have father's slippers," and "Why are you walking off with that photo? It's mine."

Susie gave him a pair of plain gold sleeve-links, and he was as delighted as a child with a new toy.

"I'll send you things from India," he promised. How kind the Allens were! He wanted to make them some return, do something for them. If only an opportunity would arise — a horse run away with them, a dog attack them, a mad dog! He was at his best in an emergency. If only he could have saved Susie from — well, from any of the things she found alarming! At intervals during his pursuit of clothes he saw himself rescuing her from drowning, from burglars, from an angry bull, from being

run over; saw himself taking her back to Rosemeads with "You trusted me to look after her!"

Mrs. Allen would be grateful. She was passionately fond of Susie. She was — he felt sure of it — rather fond of him. A good sort, Mrs. Allen.

It was true she had objected to his carrying off Susie to India. A pity, for if he had taken her with him after a three weeks' engagement what a sensation it would have caused. Nothing he had hitherto done, not even his fights or his playing for England against France, would have come up to it.

Susie was a little duck; she would have come. Perhaps, however, it was as well Mrs. Allen had intervened. He had meant what he had said, had meant it at the moment. He would have liked to have had Susie; but he wanted still more to sally forth on this adventure without anything hanging to his arm. To have her bound to him, yet leave her behind for the present, seemed to him a better arrangement. She would be there when he wanted her; no other man, neither Margerison nor Gage, would have a chance.

She was not to accompany him, but she was his — her time was at his disposal. His sisters thought him a nuisance, but Susie found a pleasure in doing things for him; and he was happy bringing handkerchiefs for her to mark, gloves for her to mend.

Susie herself, though she had little time to think, found herself wondering more than once how she would have managed to get her trousseau together in the bustle and hustle of these last weeks. With a touch of resignation she told herself her mother had been right, and yet — oh, everything was so unsatisfactory.

Being engaged was so like not being engaged. True, she might go about with Harry and do things for him

and it seemed an understood thing that in some undefined way she belonged to him. But she had expected something more.

Harry was the son of an undemonstrative mother and knew nothing of caresses. The girls he had met had wanted to kiss him and he had taken what they gave; they might do the kissing, just as they might the running. Susie was a different sort of being, a new experience. He did not know what to do with her. Love he could make, but her ignorance, the bloom on the grape, kept him from showing the chief emotion that he felt.

Susie had looked shyly at other engaged couples. They were — it was a horrid word but covered thrilling experiences — they were spoony.

Harry wasn't.

She had expected he would want to sit with him in the dusk and say silly things and hold her hand and — yes, kiss her. She had made it possible.

After shutting up the bantams, he and she were returning one evening to the house when she suggested they should sit for a little on the bench in the summer-house, and Harry had agreed. She had sat close to him — not very, only enough to make it natural that his arm should go around her.

Harry was talking, he was discussing Ralph. "I'm afraid he doesn't understand that nothing worth having comes without serious effort. I've always thought he wanted stiffening. The world makes way for those who have the will-power to conquer and forge ahead."

"I'm sure it does," said Susie and wished she hadn't a brother. "Harry, I put this frock on specially for you. It's new. How do you like it?"

"Getting too dark to see it. Let's go indoors." He got up and, still talking platitudes, led the way out.

"Those who are half-hearted and dubious of results never get anywhere."

"No," said Susie. It was tantalizing to sit close to Harry and have him talk and think of other people. Was it her fault? Did other girls know better how to manage? Was it because she was so inexperienced — because though Bobbie had cared, though Ewen had cared, she hadn't?

She couldn't help it and there was no one she could ask. You did not ask your mother, and to other girls you pretended that you had the best and most perfect lover in the world.

Before they were engaged, when Harry had looked at her, when on rare occasions his voice had lost its big resonance, had sunk into that queer soundlessness, she had been thrilled and expectant. A fire was burning under that impassive surface and it was for her; when they were engaged it would break through the crust, it would flame. They were engaged and nothing had happened.

The fire was there — it must be — but it had not broken through. When with his long, firm lips Harry touched her cheek she found the kiss entirely unsatisfactory; her

prospective stepfather kissed her as warmly.

During those three weeks Drummond more than once found Susie's glance resting on him; she seemed puzzled about something.

"Well, little girl?"

But she could not tell him she was wondering whether the older couple were as undemonstrative; whether love, after all, was only a craving and a craving —

Mrs. Allen went with Susic to the docks; and Harry at first was wholly occupied with his berth, the bestowal of his luggage, his scat in the dining-saloon. He had sailed in wind-jammers, in fishing-smacks, in grain ships, but

never before in a liner. He would enjoy the experience, he would enjoy the fact that he was travelling first class.

When the last hour came the young couple were alone in the hotel sitting-room.

Susie snatched at the happiness she had not had. "Oh, kiss me, Harry," she said, half crying, "you never kiss me."

Harry, surprised, put his strong arms about her and gave her a hug. "There!" he said consolingly.

The clasp was warm and thrillingly strong; it showed Susie what she might have had.

"It's too bad," she said.

"What's too bad?"

"I've been engaged to you three weeks," she said, and broke at last from her reserve. "I've wanted to kiss you all the time."

"Kiss me, then."

She took his face between her little hands and kissed it hungrily — the firm cheeks, the short straight nose, the brows that came to a point when he was displeased but at the moment were lying level over the bright hazel eyes; and, lastly, because she was beside herself with grief and longing, she kissed him full and fiercely on the lips.

And Harry pressed her to him, and something in him melted and he kissed her back. Women, though with the bloom on them, were still women. "Stick to me darling," he said soundlessly, "and I won't fail you. Never. I'll

be faithful to you all my life."

The door handle rattled. "It's time you went on

board, Harry," said Mrs. Allen.

Susie, very happy, very miserable, satisfied yet on the eve of loss, hung on his arm.

"You never finished my bantam-coop," she said as they went down to the wharf.

"I will," Harry promised her, "I will when I come back."

And in Mrs. Allen's heart echo gave back a single word, "When . . . when . . . "

HE dining-room at Rosemeads looked through French windows on to a gravel-path. Susie had given up sitting by the morning-room window. Why sit there, when every one who came in at the gate made you hope for the impossible? She preferred the dining-room with its northern aspect and lack of sun, and to it she had moved the little cane-chair. She sat over the fire but she was not crocheting; in her bottom drawer were as many rolls of trimming as she would use, perhaps more. Her hands were idle, but on her knee she nursed a book — "Kim"— a book which she had read once and was reading again.

She read it when other people were in the room. When she was by herself she looked over the top of the page and followed, among the red embers, the dark procession

of her thoughts.

It was so long since Harry had written.

His last letter was in the pocket of her moireen petticoat.

She was resting one hand on the tiny area of skirt that concealed it. When she closed her eyes she could see the plain strong writing, the characters dense and black on the cream-laid note.

In every letter had been some one phrase on which she could feed her heart; she recalled them, dwelt on them. "You are the only person I can really talk to." "You are sunshine to me." "Much has happened and I want

you. No one else is any good." "If a thousand women were to line up before me and I was told to choose again, it would be you I should choose."

He had chosen her; that was everything. She must remember that — keep it before her eyes, in front of her mind. She must not let herself get depressed. Once and for all she had been chosen.

Yes, chosen, but -

"Much has happened and I want you."

If he wanted her why did he not ask her to go out to him? She was ready; she had been living from day to day, month to month, in hope of a summons. She counted on her fingers — August, September, October; he had been gone seventeen months. Seventeen months! She wondered how she had managed to live through them. She had her memories and Harry's letters; not much in either to sustain her.

Harry, poor fellow, could not help himself; he was like that. He could not put down what he felt. He was marvellous, one in a thousand, and he was hers, but he was dumb. He could not express the love he felt, he could not put it into words. In his breast was the same craving as in hers; but she could say tender things, while he — he could only feel them.

Why had he not sent for her? What was preventing him? He must want her or he would not have said so. Well then, why?

In an early letter he had said there were no Englishwomen at Mookta and that the place seemed to him unhealthy. He had not alluded to it again, had left her to infer the reason.

How seldom he spoke of the thing that was really interesting — their life together, their future. She sighed. But that was Harry; he was reserved, he took

things for granted. He talked of politics, of ideas, of view-points, and rarely, very rarely, of his feelings; you might almost have thought he hadn't any.

You might - if you hadn't known better.

A step on the tiling of the hall made Susie open her book. She held it with her left hand, and while she bent her eyes upon the page, they rested also on the fingers steadying it.

Harry had promised to send her a ring, to get it as soon as he landed. Her mother had refused to let her tell her aunts and uncles about Harry until she had it to show them. It had not come and he had not explained why.

It was to have been a turquoise ring, the blue, Harry had said, of her eyes.

He could not have known how she felt about it, how much it would have comforted her to see it on her finger, to wear it and, in the dark of night, put her other hand on it and tell herself it was there.

His ring!

After all, he did not know and what did it matter? Harry loved her and she loved him; a ring was only the outward and visible sign.

One lived not by the sight of a ring, not even on the phrases of a letter, but by an inward conviction, by faith.

And faith — faith —

If only Harry would write more frequently!

She moved restlessly. Seventeen months and nothing to do but sew and think. A day and another day and yet another, and each day saturated with a queer sort of feeling, a feeling that was all mixed up, that was hope and yet was pain.

The step had passed. Susie lifted her skirt and drew out his last letter. It had been written in August, and this was December. A fairly long letter, two sheets of thin paper.

"Dear,— A few lines to let you know all's well. What a drive I have got on! But all are keying in and becoming imbued with the spirit of leadership. They have given me charge of a Maxim gun—eh, what? Beginning to recognize my quality. Have been in the Himalayas for a spell—fever—but am back invigorated, ready for anything.

"I told you once I could do anything I chose. Say I choose to make a fortune and then try my hand at using it for the benefit of others? Not swimming-baths, libraries, organs, but the real uplift of those with whom

I am thrown.

"All would have to perish who antagonistically flung themselves on the rock — that's me — of an inflexible will and determination.

"But it would need the Day of Judgment to change the outlook of people in England. Take the ugly parts — beer, vice, neglect of child-life, housing, profiteering, swindling, hypocrisy, cant, humbug, religion, and that rot; and yet, the finished product, the finest thing in the shape of men and women the world holds or ever will!

"If I had my way no Cabinet should hold office in Britain unless sound on the following points: . . ."

Susie, hunting among the hard, aloof incoherences for crumbs of affection, had to content herself with the signature:

"Yours ever,
"HARRY."

Her eyes, softening to the "yours" and "ever," lost

for a moment their unhappiness. Under the vague theorizing was buried the kind Harry who was so strong, who loved her but could not put his love into words. With his pen he had shaped the "ever," his broad hand had pressed the paper. And "ever" had meant? As long as they two should live.

"Yours ever." It was comforting, reassuring. Though she had had no letter for three months, she need not distress herself. Mails were lost at sea, in railway accidents, in the pockets of dishonest postmen. In time Harry would write again. Christmas was at hand. Perhaps he had remembered, had bought the turquoise ring and was timing it to reach her on Christmas Day.

If he had - oh, if he had!

Mrs. Allen — or rather, Mrs. Drummond, for she had been Tom Drummond's wife for over a year — coming into the dining-room in search of her daughter, saw the transient gleam.

"Are you ready, my bud?"

"Ready, mother?"

"Ready to go into the town with me?"

Susie rose with some of the old-time willingness to fall in with the wishes of others.

"I won't be a minute."

"I wonder if she has heard from him," said Mrs. Drummond to her reflection in the glass over the mantelshelf.

II

"Mother," said Susie as they walked briskly towards the High Street, "I can't understand why you go to the shops yourself for what we want. The boys call for orders." "If I didn't choose the joint I should get just anything the butcher liked to send, and the same with the fish." Under the words lay her sense that it was a pleasure to select the food her Tom was to eat, one pleasure among many.

"What are you smiling at, mother?" asked Susie wist-

fully.

"I was thinking," said Mrs. Drummond, "how pleasant it is to live in a town like this, where you know everybody. I hope, Susie, that when you marry you will settle near, so that you can run in and out."

"I should like it, too," said Susie, and thought to

herself, "Yes - but if I marry a rolling stone?"

The bright December day, a red sun overhead and rime on the grass, had brought the warmly clad people out of their houses. Christmas was near, the shop windows flauntingly gay, and they had money to burn.

"Look, mother, there's Ethel King."

A short, fair girl in a fur coat and cap was coming out of an ironmonger's. She had come to show the Archdeacon and Mrs. Margerison their eldest grandchild. Susie looked at her wistfully. She could not go to the Kings for news of Harry, but his sister-in-law might be willing to talk.

"How's baby?"

Mrs. King turned with a sense of pleasure. Her Richard was a dear, but she did not get on very well with his relatives. Susie as a connexion — and, though an engagement had not been announced, she suspected an understanding — was a relief. Mrs. King hoped that Harry would stick to her, though really, as things were, she did not see . . .

Their shopping finished, the three women turned out of the High Street.

"Old Mr. King has gone to London," Ethel King said conversationally.

"Old?" thought Mrs. Drummond. "Oh, these young

things!"

"On business?" asked Susie. Mr. King's comings and goings did not interest her; but any news was better than none.

"Would you call it business?"

Susie looked helpless. "I don't know. Why is he gone?"

Ethel settled her little pointed chin in her furs with a feeling of satisfaction. It did not do to discuss one's in-laws' affairs with other people, but Mrs. Drummond and Susie — especially Susie — were different.

"To meet Harry."

"To meet — Harry?" Susie did not attempt to conceal the immensity of her surprise, of her joy. Harry coming home, Harry in England? Impossible! "I—I have not heard for a mail or two. I had no idea. What is it? What has happened?"

"Oh, nothing to worry about. He threw up his job

in order to go to the war."

"To South Africa?" How like Harry! It was splendid of him and yet — war was a thing of bullets, of wounds. Her eyes grew dim, the light died off her face. South Africa!

"But they wouldn't pass him on account of his health."
Harry was ill. She tried to stem the rush of joy with that vague terror but did not succeed. He was coming home, he was home; his ship had been racing towards her across the blue Mediterranean, across the grey waters of the Bay. She had been fretting over his silence when it only meant that he was on his way to her.

"His letters aren't very explicit, but it sounds like

malaria. Of course, Mookta lies low." She resented the reserve which had withheld all details, hushed all surmise. "Anyway, they had to send another man to the Transvaal with Harry's gun and he is on his way home. That is practically all we know."

"Our Bear will have a sore head," Mrs. Drummond said. "He won't like another man going in charge of

his gun."

"Oh, but he is coming home," said Susie, and her mother was conscious of a semi-regret. She wished, at long last, that she had never made Mr. King's acquaintance and, through him, that of his family. He had been helpful about railway passes and she had repaid his kindness with a little—she smiled over her recollections—with a little hospitality, a little friendliness.

Of it had come this.

"Harry," said Susie dreamily, "will be here to-night."

"If the boat is in. My word, he'll find it cold here after India!" And, shuddering prettily, Ethel King turned in at her father's gate.

And that day Mrs. Drummond noticed that her daughter ate with appetite. Harry was home! At that moment he might be driving from the station to No. 14; he might be kissing his mother, talking of the voyage.

But he was ill. She must not forget that he had been invalided home. Poor Harry, who was so impatient of sickness—that is to say, impatient of it in others. But he had had a month on board ship, a month of sea-air and rest and liner-feeding. It must have made a difference. She didn't want him to be quite, quite well. Restored health would mean rushing about in search of work. If he were only convalescent he would have time on his hands, he would be often at Rosemeads.

She moved the cane-chair back into the morning-room and got out her crochet. Ethel King had shown her a new pattern, a heading for short curtains; and she would sit by the window, telling herself that a watched pot never boils, that Harry's boat was not yet in, that he could not possibly have arrived.

She sat there till the dusk fell, till she could no longer see the strip of white work about which her fingers were moving. On the following morning she went back to her post, and Mrs. Drummond, returning from her daily shopping, brought her what news there was.

"Mr. King is not yet back from town," she said, and Susie thanked her and went on with her work. She had waited seventeen months, what was another day?

December days can be the longest in the year and the coldest and the blackest.

A week of waiting and yet Harry had not come. Susie's crochet lay in her lap, but she still sat at the window, at the wide window that overlooked the path to the front door.

Ethel King, meeting Mrs. Drummond by chance, told her what she knew. "Yes, the boat is in, but Harry isn't coming home. I don't understand it."

" Is be ill?"

"I — I don't know. I think he is better. At any rate, he's going away again."

"Where is he going?"

"I think, I'm not sure, but I think he is going to South Africa. Queer, isn't it? But they don't tell you much."

She was resentful. The wife of the eldest son and yet excluded from family talks! You would have thought, taking everything into consideration, that they would have been glad to confide in her, ask her advice. But no, they kept, their own counsel. What was it the curate had

said — "a stiff-necked generation"? "Stiff-necked"—a good word, just right for them. They were that, all of them, all but Richard, all but dear old Dick.

Mrs. Drummond walked on home. As she entered the garden she glanced at the morning-room window. Susie was in her chair but, in eloquent testimony to wakeful nights, her head was laid against the red cushion and she no longer marked who came and went. Her mother, seeing that she slept, paused for a moment. Under the closed eyes were shadows, deeper shadows than had been cast by her lashes. Even in her sleep she looked unhappy.

A pang went through Ursula Drummond's heart for Phineas, dead and rotting in his grave, for Phineas's little girl, his favourite child, cherished yet so unhappy.

III

Mr. King pulled down his cuffs and, moving slowly, pushed the brim-brush around his hat. His work was done. Regretfully he prepared to leave. During the day he was so busy that he had moments of absorption, moments when his inner life seemed hushed and dead. He dreaded the return of night, of the night in which no man may work.

On the edge of the night, too, came the recurrent passing of the feet. They were the feet of workmen released from work, of clerks like himself, of factory operatives; and their trampling broke through all absorption. At the end of a business day, when the feet were going out of the town, when none were coming back, they beat, not on the pavement, but on his tired brain.

When he returned from London Mr. King had told his wife and children that Harry's health had improved

during the voyage; that he had wished to volunteer for service in South Africa; that, in fact, he had done so and was gone. Between himself and his family he had set up a screen of silence, between himself and the world.

But behind the screen!

Though he did his best, there were times. He would be absorbed in calculation and a shadow would fall, blotting out the figures, releasing his unruly thoughts. They would rush, flashing him pictures, back to that evening at the hotel.

Among so much else, an evening of aspects.

He could not understand how a child born of his coolness, his stern restraint, could have gone so terribly astray.

He had put it to Harry, and Harry had hesitated for

a moment. "It was curiosity."

"But she — the woman — you tell me she was black?"

"She was a native."

"I should have thought that would have made it impossible."

Harry, hanging his head boyishly, had blundered on.

"They told me it would be different."

Different! Then Harry . . .

He had often wondered about his boys, and, wondering, had hoped for the best. He could not do more than set them an example. "Different!" he had said, with unhappy acceptance of the implication.

In the whirl of uprooted faiths he had clung to one

supporting stay: it was not in any way his fault.

Harry had said long ago that he was not afraid, that he would try things for himself. Mr. King had not thought it possible that the itch to experiment could carry him over the gulf fixed between good and evil. The boy had been brought up in a Christian home, had not lacked

for precept any more than example. Yet — with everything in his favour he could coldly, out of mere curiosity

A rush of footsteps! They broke in on Mr. King's consideration of cause and effect, on his bewilderment. They carried him back to the sound of other steps — of Harry's steps on the oilcloth of the passage, of Harry's steps receding, growing fainter — those steady steps which were going out.

Something tore at Mr. King's heart, for if he had said a word, if he had sprung up from that hard, upright chair and called to the lad . . .

Coming, breathless, to the surface, Mr. King found he was still pushing the brim-brush around his hat.

Under a full moon the December night was pale. In the street the flood of workmen was diminishing, and when Mr. King stepped out of the door he looked on a sweep of grey road broken only by an occasional figure, a mechanic, a belated errand-boy, a woman laden with parcels.

The velvet-clad figure of the woman seemed to him familiar; but, preoccupied as he was, people whom he had known were become almost strange.

"I wanted to see you," Mrs. Drummond said as he came up to her.

He murmured the conventional greeting. What did she want? She belonged to the immensity surrounding his lurid inner life. Like the rest of the world, she was a figure seen through mist.

"Before Harry went to India he asked my little girl to marry him. . . ."

"Poor child," said Mr. King, but with a relapse into vagueness and distance. Susie's sorrows were to him as the crying of a seagull in the dark. That innocent crying

was part of the mist, and he was sorry, mildly, for what it expressed; but there were worse things than loneliness and cold and night, worse things even than broken troth.

"Ah!" cried Mrs. Drummond, with a little rush of mother-heat. "I was afraid of this. He is so weak, so changeable."

The accusation echoed through Mr. King's mind. Had Harry's backsliding been due to weakness? Was he, whose physique was so splendid, morally weak? A poor creature, weak?

Not at long last, no. Mr. King could be proud of Harry, of Harry who had accepted his fate, who had offered no plea, no excuse, but had gone — willingly.

But changeable? Perhaps. Pugilist and engineer, England, India, and South Africa. Lover of variety, he had been for ever drifting and shifting. Ay, up till now! But what he had to do now would be carried through. He had been changeable in life, but it was no longer a question of life.

With an effort the father dragged his thoughts back to Mrs. Drummond. She had been speaking to him of her daughter, a little young thing whom he remembered vaguely, a hapless thing.

"She is young," he said kindly.

"Seventeen - no, eighteen."

"She will forget."

How blessed to be young and within reach of forgetfulness! "Poor child!" he said again. After all, the sorrows of a child . . .

In Mrs. Drummond's mind was the merest glimmer of understanding, but she felt that here was trouble, a trouble beyond consolation. She walked beside Mr. King

in silence, and he was dully conscious of her as a figure on the edge of his inferno, a something that did not add to his pain.

It was a long while since any one had come so near. It seemed to him as if for ages he had been alone with his thoughts, with that one disastrous memory.

Harry had said "I can go out," and he had answered, misapprehending him, "To South Africa?"

Harry had said almost carelessly, "Oh, in the other sense!" Then, after a moment's thought, "But that will do; South Africa will be the way of it."

There had been the faintest pause. He felt that Harry must have hoped. It was, after all, his life. All the long and fruitful years . . .

But he, Harry's father, had not spoken, and the boy had got up and without another word he had gone out.

"The lusts of the flesh," said Mr. King as if he were thinking aloud, as if his thoughts were an indictment of the power which had given poor humanity, not bread, but tables of stone.

To Ursula Drummond the words were illuminating. The tale of some illicit love-affair must have come to Mr. King's ears and because of it he had refused to let Harry return home. She was familiar with the workings of the older man's mind; knew that in those circumstances he would think Harry unfit for the society of his sisters, unfit to marry a girl such as Susie.

"The wages of sin," said Mr. King, as if the words were wrung from him, as if he spoke them against his will, unable any longer to hold them back, "the wages of sin is death."

The woman beside him smothered an exclamation. She was startled out of her easy attitude towards events and

character. What did he mean? What had happened? Sin? His interpretation of the word had always been narrowed to sexual irregularity.

He was intolerant of it as a desecration of the body, that body which to him was the temple of Godhead. But he must know that his view was unusual — that such things happened, were lived down and, for all practical purposes, forgotten. Why talk of death in connexion with them? The woman taken in adultery had been told to go and sin no more, and why not Harry? Was there more in the matter than she, Ursula, had supposed? It looked like it. The note of pain in Mr. King's voice had been unmistakable.

She abandoned the attempt to understand. No matter the cause. Here was a soul in straits, a soul that was calling to her, not because she grasped what was amiss, but because she was kind. To Mr. King she was not a friend, not even a woman, only a something living, a something that heard.

"Death makes clean," he said in a sort of quick mutter, and he was given to me — clean.

"God is hard. I have served Him all my days — uphill all the way — and after a lifetime of service

[&]quot;That I should have to say it.

[&]quot;If I had to do it again - oh yes, I should, I should.

[&]quot;I was so proud of him.

[&]quot;With my own lips, I, who begot him . . .

[&]quot;I try to do my work. Thinking does no good. It's done, it's done.

[&]quot;I can't stop thinking. I'm back at the hotel and I see his face. He was willing; so young, yet — yet he was willing.

"I follow him across the map, down the grey-green of the sea to the red patch at the South, a little black ship

"If only something would break, here, inside, so that I need not think.

"So that I could forget I sent him . . .

"So that I didn't hear his footsteps . . .

"I cannot bear it and I've got to; but I cannot, no, no, I cannot."

His steps had quickened until Mrs. Drummond had found it difficult, then impossible, to keep up with him. She fell behind but he did not notice. Still muttering to himself, he walked rapidly along the moonlit road.

IV

"Ursula," said Mr. Drummond, "I can't bear to see that kid of yours so down in the mouth."

Mrs. Drummond sighed, yet looked expectant. She had done her best and it had been of no avail. Was it possible Tom had something to suggest?

"As I came through the garden just now I saw her speaking to Mrs. Clegg."

"The woman to whom she has given the bantams?"

He nodded. "It was evident Mrs. Clegg wanted the coop as well as the birds."

"Oh, poor Susie!" She recalled Harry's last words; "I'll finish it when I come back. . . ."

"She seemed willing to give it, yet she held back as if the woman were asking for something out of reason."

A listless, dragging step came through the hall, and presently Susie entered the room. She was looking for something.

"What is it, my bud?"

"A book I was reading, but it doesn't matter."

"What was the name?"

"'Story of an African Farm."

Mrs. Drummond did not glance at her Tom. "I think it is in the drawing-room, dear; on one of the shelves by the fireplace."

Harry, in Africa, was learning at first hand about kopjes and Kafirs and the veldt, and Susie must be reading of these matters. The pity of it—that all eyes should be turned upon the Transvaal!

"Oh, thank you!" Susie, a pale listless Susie, drifted away. She did not care whether or no she found the book, but she would look on the drawing-room shelves because it was the next thing to be done and life was a procession of dull hours to be padded out with events, with events that were like sawdust.

The clear brightness of the drawing-room — green felt over black boards, black curtains and dado threaded with lines of vivid Eastern colour, sunlight on cushions of gold tissue, of dragons, the hairy prickly dragons of Chinese imagination — affected her pleasantly for a moment. She entered with a little blink of the long eyelashes. Not very long ago the days had been like that kind, warm room.

"Now," she thought, "it's as if the scrogglywogs on the cushions had been changed from that nice thick gold to stuffy material. I wonder why? Oh, but it doesn't matter."

The shelves by the fireplace held the flotsam of the house. Susie ran her eyes along the uneven lines. No, her mother had been mistaken: but she didn't particularly want the "African Farm," any book would serve. "A Self-denying Ordinance" in royal blue challenged her attention, and she pulled it out. Drawing a rush-

stool towards the fire — for Susie was a chilly mortal and of late chillier than ever — she turned the pages. It seemed a melancholy book, the sort of book to read by a warming fire, when the wind was talking to itself in the chimney and out of doors the grey rain swept like a moving curtain over the land.

Susie turned the pages but she did not read. She was listening to the wind, endowing it with consciousness,

giving it a story.

"Even if he has left you, Wind, you should not whimper. That is not the way to do. You should behave as usual; go about your little household duties, the flowers and that. It bothers other people if you don't.

"I expect he got tired of you, Wind. I dare say the only prizes you got at school were for good conduct — oh yes, and punctuality. Perhaps when he talked of magnetos and crank-shafts and things like that, you did not understand. A man gets tired of explaining and explaining — oh yes, Wind, he does.

"And you can't blame him.

"If you are a stupid little creature, Wind . . ."

But Wind continued to bemoan itself, and presently Susie turned to the "Self-denying Ordinance." It was fat; it would take a long time to read. She glanced at the chapter-headings; some were in verse. She did not care very greatly for poetry, but little snacks, little selected bits, were sometimes interesting. All unsuspectingly she began a verse:

Never any more
While I live
Need I hope to see his face
As before.

When her mother had said "Harry has not been faith-

ful to you," the blow, falling on the source of sensation, had left Susie stunned, and this condition had persisted, but behind it a change had been gradually taking place. She read, and the barrier fell before a tide that had long been rising. She saw Harry's face, dear, oh, inexpressibly dear—saw it as a whiteness against a dark background, the face that she so loved.

Never any more while she lived might she hope to see

it.

Susie bent her head over the book, rocking to and fro in an agony of grief.

Never any more - oh, never, never. . . .

In the other room her elders were seeking a way out. "The child wants a change of scene," said Tom Drummond kindly.

"But if we took her to Brighton or Worthing . . ."

"I've a better idea. I've always wanted to know how foreign owners ran their quarries. For a month or more work will be slack here . . . and there are quarries in the South of France, in Spain, in Italy. I could get introductions to the owners and managers . . ."

"You'd take Susie and me?"

Tom Drummond lifted his pipe from the mantelshelf and began to fill it. "Should you mind if Gage went along? I'm going to take him into partnership, and it would be a good thing for him to see how these foreign jossers manage."

"Tom!" said Mrs. Drummond, and went over to him

and put a finger under his square chin.

"Well, my dear?"

"Do you know, I've wondered sometimes . . ." She swung abruptly into a fresh sentence. "It's been a grief to me that I couldn't give you children."

"It's all right, old lady, quite all right."

"I didn't like to think that a man like you . . . I wanted you to have sons and grandsons and things."

"Well?"

"Well, perhaps it is all right - eh, Tom?"

Tom, puffing, was heard to murmur, "I should say so."

"Oh, Tom, how wrong of you, how very, very wrong!" She meditated. "And Gage is like you — your shoulders, your walk. . . ."

"He's doing well," said the impenitent Tom, "and he's a good chap. Can't help hoping that in the end he'll

pull it off with Susie."

"And if they did . . ." said Mrs. Drummond, brightening. "Why, Tom, if they did, their children would be

our - yes, our grandchildren!"

"Nothing like a woman for looking ahead," said Tom, but he smiled. "Then that's settled, old lady — off to the Continong this day week."

IE iron roofing of the dock-sheds was a dazzling white under the rays of the sun. In the background rose the strange bulk of Table Mountain and the front was a dapple of bright water. Big liners, ugly as warehouses, lay like so much dead material on the lapping tide; innumerable sailing vessels swayed and swung; dirty tramps stacked with compressed hay were being unloaded by brown Malays, light-coloured Cape boys, jet-black, red-brown Kafirs; and through the movement and bustle ran the creak of lifting derricks and the deep note of the African voice.

A company of men in khaki, men with sea-burned faces, had been drawn up in a double line by some open trucks. They stood by their dunnage, waiting for more than the order to board the trucks; they had been standing for some time in the sun and dust beside the open trucks, waiting.

Captain Smee, who had come from England with the draft, and who thought it disposed of, looked up from a refreshing tumbler to see it still standing beside the line.

"What the devil -" said he, and tilted his glass quickly

and went out.

"What is the hitch?" he asked of the sergeant, but before explanation could be given a short, thick man with an eye hard and cold as that of a cock stepped forward and saluted.

" Well? "

[&]quot;There are some Cape boys in the truck, sir."

The young officer became aware of three dock labourers, brown-skinned men who were standing in a corner of one of the railway-wagons.

"I see!" What he did not see was how the natives could be prevented from going about their lawful business. He cursed his lack of experience, conscious of a cold, bright glance resting on him, appraising him. What did one do? The crying need was to do something, and he plunged.

"Well - there's plenty of room."

Trooper King's eye told him he had done the wrong thing.

"We can't travel with Cape boys, sir."

Having chosen a course, Captain Smee persisted in it. To do so showed you were a leader, earned you the respect of the men.

"You've got to get up to the front!"

"If you'll give the order, sir, we'll shift those niggers." An offer very simply urged; no eagerness, merely a wish to be of use. Snee looked at the man doubtfully. A word and the Cape boys would be sent flying. It would not do, of course.

"What do they matter?" he asked. "There's only three of them. You will have worse things to put up with than that."

Harry King did not answer. During his weeks on the troopship extra fatigues had taught him that he, even he, was under discipline. The Army was a school from which you did not run away — at least, if you did you were brought back and shot. You could not even down tools and walk off. The liberty of the subject was interfered with in every way. Nevertheless you had rights, a few, and in order to prove you were not a slave you stood for them. Until Harry told the draft, they had not known

they need not travel with natives, but, knowing it, they stood immovable.

"Come, men."

They looked from him to the Cape boys in the truck, and no one stirred.

"We can't travel with niggers, sir." Harry's voice was so respectful that not even his N.C.O had any fault to find; he was, in fact, of the same opinion as the man.

Captain Smee drew him aside for a moment. The trucks had been provided to take the draft to the front and no more would be forthcoming; but — if the labourers were also wanted up the line?

"I should see the transport officer, sir."

Harry, left with the draft, began to talk in clipped, ex-

plosive fashion, his fashion:

"They thought we didn't know; but I'm just from India. No white man travels with natives; it isn't done. They'd think Jack was as good as his master. Then where should we be? British rule in India! Prestige! And what started this war? Coloured chaps getting too big for their boots."

"Boers aren't coloured," said a hard-bitten Scot;

"they're Dutchies."

"It's all the same; they aren't English."

"British, you mean!" returned the Scot.

Trooper King ignored him.

"We're here. We're willing to fight till all's blue. Bursting to be up and at 'em. We've chucked our jobs at home and come out, and what do we get for it? Because we didn't know, they try to send us up-country with stinking brutes of Kafirs. No way to do. Taking advantage."

His audience was pleased with the little interlude, but the sun was hot, the small black flies teazingly active! Now that they had asserted their rights they hoped fresh and more comfortable arrangements would be made and soon. Dry work waiting and the sun was no joke.

"Old sweats," concluded Harry, "might have put up with it, they'd put up with anything; but we're volun-

teers, we have rights -"

In one of the sheds a driven transport officer was dealing with the matter, and while he laboured Captain Smee talked idly with another man.

"Who made the objection?"

"Trooper King."

"King?"

"The chap who kept the ship waiting at Queenstown."

"I remember! Couldn't get leave so took it and half the draft with him. Jove! I shan't forget seeing it stravaiging back on those outside cars."

"Which had been borrowed - forcibly!" said Smee.

He was worried, inclined to magnify offences.

"Thought every moment would see the lot of them in the water," chuckled the other.

"We took it out of them — him — afterwards," said Smee viciously. "'Fatigue, sir? I don't know what

fatigue is.' I bet he knows now."

"Pity he's only a volunteer. He's the sort, once he's learnt discipline, to make a fine soldier; but for that you need time. Can't turn out a good brand without years of maturing, and this war —

The other shrugged his shoulders regretfully. "What

do you expect?—a lot of farmers."

Other dock labourers had come up, had climbed into the trucks, and the draft had stood with stony faces, looking on. The trucks no longer concerned them. In good time accommodation would be provided; meanwhile, if one or two got sunstroke—

Fresh rolling-stock was at length provided and the order given to entrain. The carriages provided had been cattle-trucks and were without seats; in each was standing room for about forty persons. The men's grievance had been legitimate. The authorities had vindicated their right to power by attending to it, and the draft, placated, settled down contentedly to a two days' journey the discomforts of which would be heartbreaking.

But what matter? Their rights had been acknowledged and "up there" a fight was on. They had to get "there," and flies, dust, heat, parched throats, and lack of space were all in a day's work. They looked past the moment into the future, a future each man pictured happily as lurid. They must get "there" before the fun was over.

Harry King, no longer the eternal cigarette between his lips — the doctor had forbidden him to smoke — stood looking between the bars of the truck at the country through which the train was passing. The monotony of ship-board life had tried his temper, and he was glad to exchange the waste of water, deep blue waves on every side as far as the eye could reach, for this. Land must have been dubbed terra firma by some one fresh from a sea voyage, some one sick of the ceaseless movement of the water.

Cape Town might be hot - strange that December in old England should mean summer here - but except for that, and the coloured folk and the loom of Table Mountain, the place was not unhomely. Something about it was familiar, welcoming. India was a far land and a foreign; but this, in spite of seas between, was next door to England. As the suburbs swung into view, Harry could have fancied he was gazing at a Surrey landscape. White cottages peeped at him from among trees that he

could name, a thin blue reek rose on the quiet air, and about the lawns were flower-beds. "Roses," he said to himself, "and oaks and firs."

Behind him his thirty-nine companions were easing their discomfort as best they could. Some slept, some read, the majority smoked. Very few were interested in the land, new to them, through which they were travelling. Even when the river ran through the Hex River Pass, climbing through magnificent vegetation into a region of misty rain, they saw the scenery, not as a wonder and a wild desire, but as the cause of greater discomfort than they had yet known. Harry proclaimed to himself that they were soulless brutes. He was impressed by the quickly changing character of the landscape. He wondered over the rocks and depths, the strange trees, towering yellow-woods, specbooms full of sap, the wild vines laden with purpling fruit. What a big world! Three weeks of steady travelling and a new landscape; as it were, a fresh creation. England - the Hex River Pass - two out of a dozen, a hundred. The astounding variety! Ah, it was good to be alive in such a world!

For an expansive moment he forgot he was doomed. The mists of the pass, breaking to let him view the far-flung wonders of rock and slope and torrent, shook a grey veil before his eyes. As the rain fell he remembered he had come to South Africa under sentence of death.

His heart sank, the hollow of his chest filled with a sensation no longer strange to him, with an ache.

The folly of an idle hour. Mr. King had dubbed it vice, but Harry knew it had only been folly. Some men had come up the line, they had spent a convivial evening, and towards the drunken end of it some one had suggested the bazaar. He had not been very keen to go —

A still night and dark. They went between windowless walls and through thick blackness and smells. He had not known where he was, but the feeling that at any moment he might be attacked, that danger lurked in the silence, a danger of knives and vengeance, had been exhilarating. He did not know when he had enjoyed a walk so much.

The dim lights and the strange perfume — that burning perfume — and the woman.

She must have known; yet, if she did, why — why —? He had not harmed her.

Ah — but if he could! At long last he desired her, desired — and he saw her face, saw it through a red mist.

If he could have gone back to the little room in which was that acrid scent! If he could have found her there!

His hands clenched on the bars of the cattle-truck until the wood creaked.

When the Boers had been convinced of folly he would go back. Though it took years he would find her, and then — the knuckles of his hands were white as he clutched the bar — then he would squeeze her neck. He saw the slim brown throat; he could span it with one hand. His fingers would close — would sink — yes, when the war was over, when peace —

Peace?

His grip relaxed. Before peace was proclaimed he, Harry King, would be dead.

Dead? No -

He stood aghast. Impossible that he should be dead. Not — dead?

He glanced at his hand, the hand that could do so many things, and saw it dead; it would be stiff, inert, white. It would lie on the ground until lucky devils who were still alive dug a hole and shovelled it in; it would lie there in the earth changing, changing horribly, until only bones remained — a raffle of nameless bones.

Harry no longer saw the country through which he was being carried. What was South Africa to him? He had come hither because accident and folly had made it impossible that he should live. His body had become foul with disease, rotten, and he abhorred it. He could not feel it was himself. Himself unclean?—he who all his life had set cleanliness before godliness? His body was not himself but a skin that could be sloughed. Himself was what thought on this matter — what felt disease as a disgrace, as disgusting, something contained in this unfortunate body but free of it.

Ah, but the time had been when his body had been subservient to his needs, his need to strive, to impress himself on his fellows, to take part in what was doing. He had been content with it, proud of it—the inches of his chest, the girth of his limbs, his punch, the punch with a sting in it.

Twenty-six years, and he had hoped for three score and ten, for more! He did not want to untie whatever bound him to his body. He had meant to set the Thames afire. He could not bear to think of others doing it —

If he had deserved his fate! He glanced at the soulless thirty-nine and wondered whether any one of them had lived a cleaner life than he. He had been too busy with his schemes and plans to waste much time on women. Yet it was he on whom the curse of disease had fallen—he who, because of it, was to stop a bullet, to stay behind when the others sailed for England.

He imagined their return. They had homes in the old country. They would go back to their workaday lives, doing odd jobs about some little house at evening after they had finished a day of toil. Slatternly wives, grubby children, ill-requited labour! Ah, but nothing mattered as long as you were in it, part of the show.

They would go back but he - he must stay.

Again that vision of earth being shovelled into a pit, of a quietude that was negation.

He had a theory that the mound on a grave was in proportion to the size of him it covered. The mound on his would be high — yes, till his chest gave, till the ribs sank, till they were pressed against his backbone, till they lay bone to bone.

On the levelled mound the grass would be lush; it would be well nourished, that grass.

Mechanically Harry lowered himself on to the boards of the cattle-truck. His trouble, the ache in his breast, was robbing him of vitality. He wanted to curl up, to hide like an animal that has been injured. Elbows on knees, he sat hunched up in a corner, his face buried in his hands, and if any looked that way they thought he slept.

He was very far from sleeping. The rhythm of the train beat out his fierce, despairing contention that it was unjust, unjust, unjust; and through the slits between the bars the red dust of the Karoo sifted, settling on the men and their accourtements; and every hour brought the draft nearer to the singing of bullets and the roar of guns.

Harry had been told by persons as ignorant as himself that for this disease was no cure. The doctors, the people with information, spoke guardedly, impressing on him the necessity for treatment. He had not opened his mind to them; he could not voice its crude beliefs and nothing would have induced him to put into words the fear that was tearing at him. Acknowledge that he,

Harry King, could be afraid? But he was. He feared disease, its ravages, the helplessness to which he might be reduced. He was so terribly afraid, that death had come to mean escape.

The doctors were, perhaps, lacking in imagination. The patient was a young, hitherto healthy man. Aftereffects? In this case quite unlikely. The fever would run its course. There was no need for alarm but he must be sure to report himself, to take the medicine.

They did not suspect that the patient's silence covered terror and credulity, that he regarded them as paid to make soothing statements and that he did not believe a word they said.

He did not, in fact, pay much attention to them. He would take the medicine, more because he liked taking it than from belief in its efficacy. He knew that no cure was possible — knew because he had been told, because those who told him had backed their statements with examples. He had had wrecks of humanity pointed out to him.

He had told his father and his father had been overwhelmed. He had talked brokenly of the judgment of Heaven, had grovelled before his Deity; but the main point was, he had been overwhelmed!

He felt about it as Harry did. By different routes father and son had come to the same conclusion.

The old man had been crushed. Harry felt a thrill of miserable elation. His father cared. He had not guessed his father, so stern, so aloof, would care.

And, though he cared, he did not waver. Wonderful! Gee, but he was strong!

When it was his own son, too!

Disease was foul. The body was made in the image of

God. Harry had sinned and had been overtaken by the wrath of his Maker!

He was doomed: the wages of sin — a slow, a horrible death. Mr. King had read about it in an old novel. Though shocked, he had read to the end. There were things a man, the father of a family, ought to know.

But oh - that it should be Harry!

That he must rot, slowly, into his grave! He would be a misery to himself, a burden to them all. No, he must not take his life—

But he might give it!

There was the war!

O God - his life, Harry's life!

Harry, troubled in health, confounded, desperate, had been willing. At least he would have one last fine adventure, finer, perhaps, than all the others—

His voyages — from India home and from England to Cape Town — had, however, proved beneficial. He was, if not his old self, at least a heartier man than he had been for months. The extra fatigues that he incurred no longer left him exhausted, and with the flowing tide came regret for what he was about to lay down.

He had been damned unlucky!

So he had; still, there was one compensation, and he came gradually to the contemplation of it. No risk was any longer too great for him to take! When in the past he had dared recklessly he had known all the time that he was a fool for his pains. Now he had acquired the right to risk his life. The bullet that was going to end his trouble had been cast, and by nothing he could do could he bring any nearer the appointed hour. For him life and its ambitions were at an end, and he might please himself — dare all, venture all, attempt the impos-

sible. Glorious, splendid! These last hours would be his happiest, his most satisfying. He was going to the front to kill Boers, to have a last wild, mad, reckless, ecstatic fling.

He sat up in his corner, an indomitable little man—little as Roberts, as Wellington, as Napoleon; a fighter too. He would fight until they dropped him. Every Boer that he killed would mean one less, would bring a little nearer the triumph of England — not Britain as the Scot had said; and he didn't like that Scot, too argumentative!

"England, Mother England!" What a rallying-cry! The thirty-nine — decent chaps, all of them — had come out to fight. He'd show them how. They should fight till they won, fight till they knew no more. That was the way of it. You were trying so hard to get the other man that you never thought of yourself, and if by some mischance it fell that he got you — well, you didn't know it. You died but you didn't know that you were dead; you never knew.

II

The yellow-brown waters of the Orange River had come down in flood; they were swirling in suggestive eddies over the Drift. On either side the loamy banks had been trampled by the passage of feet and the clay of them pushed down, pressed into the sand and stones that formed the river-bottom. At ordinary times the combination made a ford by which man and beast could cross, but rains up-country had increased the pressure of the water. The bed of the wide stream was no longer uniformly shallow, the opaque water hid pits and holes, and on the preceding day some horses and a man in charge of them had been washed away.

Captain Smee was worried. Should he wait till the waters had fallen or make another attempt? His orders were to advance as quickly as possible, but when it was a case of risking the men's lives —

Responsibility was the devil and all. He wished he had not chosen the Army as a profession; he wished he knew what to do.

A trooper stepped up to him and saluted. Smee understood that he was volunteering to make the passage. He hesitated a moment longer.

"You think you could get over?"

"Sure of it, sir!"

"But Sergeant Knight was drowned there yesterday."

"He crossed too low, sir."

Captain Smee's face cleared. "Very well, King, carry

on, and good luck to you!"

Harry waded forthwith into the stream. The pull of the water was cold against his legs. It tugged like a thousand fingers, it pushed with an ever-shifting but steady push. Yet it was not deep. The water flung itself at him, it splashed and tore; but it could not reach above his knees and the foothold was good. Harry was happy. To pit one's strength against the remorseless river, to know it up to every dodge, know it would get you if it could! His round pillars of legs pushed mightily against the turgid current, and his comrades on the bank watched with an interest heightened by the knowledge that where he went they must follow.

He reached midstream, and still the water, leaping, churning, pushing, was only up to his knees. Suddenly the breath of the watchers became a sound, a cry of dismay. The water had risen to Harry's waist, to his neck. One moment the footing had been good, a strong footing, hard; another and it was gone. It had sunk away, there

was no footing. Harry went souse, felt himself whirling in an irresistible torrent. The river had him and was carrying him away. On the bank a cry of dismay ran from lip to lip. Harry was popular. From the beginning he had foraged for them; he had a hookey thumb and a conviction that the men should be fed like fighting-cocks. His passage through a Boer farm left it an unwitting contributor to the needs of the Army, and when jam was short elsewhere his company could, if it wished, have overeaten itself. Not a man in the column but searched the seething waters for Harry's black head, not one but shouted when it reappeared.

When Harry, the defiant crest plastered in wet rings on his crown, broke the surface, he found he was some way down the river. His instinct was to struggle against the force whirling him away. He was a strong swimmer, and it did not occur to him that his life was in danger. He could get out on the wrong side of the river where the current curved in towards the bank; but he would not then have found the passage by which the troops could cross. The watching men saw that he was heading for a sandbank in the middle of the stream - saw him gain it, pull himself out, and look about him for a moment as if taking stock. They watched him eagerly. Would he swim across or would he try to come back to them? Well, he had done his best, and it was evident the crossing was impossible. They must wait till the river had gone down. To their surprise, however, Harry set his face up-stream and began, step by step, to stem the rushing spread of the water. The bank shelved a little and the rush grew fiercer. It was as much as he could do to make headway. Nevertheless, he was doing it. He was working slowly up. He had passed the spot from which he had started on his forlorn hope. It dawned on the

men that, having set out to find a way by which they could cross, he was holding to his purpose.

A few feet farther up and, turning at right angles, he splashed out to the middle of the stream. At each step he sank a little and the water raged at him. This time, however, it was in vain. The bottom was sound—a bed of stones and sand held together by the clay. He crossed without mishap and, the water streaming from him, at once began to climb the opposite bank.

The column cheered, and Trooper King, looking back in surprise, waved to it and vanished over the brow. He was in a hurry for he had private business to transact, the preliminary to which was starting a fire; and he was wondering whether his little metal box had kept the matches dry.

By the river grew some dinna-bessie shrubs. Harry selected a couple of large flat stones, set them on end, and piled the space between with the oily fuel of the plants. His quick eye had noted the usual litter of kerosene-tins; he selected one and, after holding it between his eye and the sun to make sure it was sound, filled it with water.

When the first men of the advancing column came over the brink flames were leaping about the kerosenetin and Trooper King, with an absorbed expression, was cramming his breeches into the bubbling water.

"You don't lose no time," said a man, halting beside him.

"They are crummy."

"I guess we're all that," grumbled Bristow; "they

ought to give us a change of clothes."

"Or time off to boil them," said a third. "I boiled mine last Saturday week and in two days the little chaps were as busy as ever!"

"You didn't boil them long enough," said Harry. Scouts having brought word that no signs of the enemy could be discovered, orders had been given for the column to camp for the night on the farther bank of the river. Harry, his skin gleaming white against the riding-boots of his mates, lent a hand wherever needed, and at intervals returned to stir the scummy contents of the kerosenetin.

The day was advanced. Presently a meal would be served out, and the men, well fed and sleepy, would gather round the camp fires and sing and talk. A smell of coffee rose from his billy-can.

Suddenly, with a vicious spit, a bullet struck the mimosa-tree by which he was standing. He was taken so much by surprise that for a moment he stood motionless. The flames shining on his queerly apparelled figure, made it only too visible. A bullet kicked up the dust at his feet, another flew past his ear, and then Trooper King, coming to himself, took cover.

The scouts had been misled and the Boers were closing in. They had arranged a surprise party for the column,

had hoped to catch it napping.

A bugle blew, the order to break camp was given, and Harry found himself in a quandary. In the pot his breeches were boiling merrily, but not even his hardihood could face slipping his legs into their heated trunks.

What to do?

"Mount and ride," sang the bugle. "You'll be shot," spat the bullets.

The camp was like a nest of disturbed ants, but in a few minutes, with what they could save of their gear, the men were off.

Only later, on parade, was the discovery made that Harry's nether garment was to seek. His sergeant was inclined to regard the incident as Trooper King trying to be funny. He shook his head over the explanation offered.

"If we was to allow such goings-on the whole company might turn up without their breeches."

The worst of it was they had no extra stores and were far from a depot. In the end Harry was fitted out with a pair that had belonged to Sergeant Knight. Unfortunately, that worthy had been full-waisted and long in the leg.

Harry was fined the cost of a new pair.

He made no comment, but as he walked away was seen to draw a small black notebook from his pocket and make an entry.

Bristow, who was near, could see he had entered some figures on the debit side of the page.

"What are you up to now?"

"I keep accounts," said Trooper King.

"If you put down all they pinch it'll be a pretty long

reckoning," said the other.

"The longer the better. I'm good at addition." He grinned and looked up sideways. "And at subtraction," said he.

Bristow, thinking of jam and other matters, could

agree. "But what's it for?"

"I came out here to fight," his wide brow had come down into an obtuse angle over narrowed lids, "and I do my best, and this is the way I'm treated. Every farthing of mine they pinch I'll get back, every little damned farthing."

"By the time we've got the old Bible-punchers on the

run you'll have forgotten," said Bristow.

"Me forget?" said Harry. "I don't think."

"Oh - when the war's over -"

Like a cold hand on his heart came the recollection that when the war was over he would indeed have forgotten. He slipped the notebook back into his pocket. They had taken his money, taken it unjustly, but what did it matter? He — about to die —

ROOPER KING on his own initiative had taken a prisoner. He had been swinging along to the pleasant jingle of chains and creaking of leather when, as the line passed a low kraal wall, a bullet "zipped" from behind it. It had picked him out from the rest, drilling a hole in his hat. Trooper King, imagining himself hit, had forthwith leaped the obstacle and gone in pursuit; before he fell he would "get" the man who had fired at him!

An angle of the wall formed a sort of shelter, and as Harry leaped, a man, crouching, bent double, the man who had fired, ran towards it. Harry, bayonet in hand, bore down on him, and at the sound of hoofs he turned. He was a big dark man, finely built and of a brave carriage, but at the clink of steel he wavered. He could fight from behind a wall — he came of a harried race that for many generations had fought thus — but he could not fight in the open. Dearly as he wanted to fire again, the look on Henry's face proved too much for him. He hesitated, he went to pieces.

As Harry knocked up the gun he saw that the man wore the chevrons of a sergeant. "You are no Dutchie," he said. It was not thus the Boers behaved; give them their due, they were handsome fighters.

The man grinned, a helpless vicious grin. "I'm Irish

- taken prisoner by the Boers."

"Turncoat!" said Harry rudely.

The other scowled. "Been doing all I know to escape."

"Looks like it. Well, come on, now."

He disarmed the man, watched him vault the kraal wall and stride down the slope. Trying to escape? Why, the swine had taken deliberate arm and then run for it. Irish, too—

On rejoining the column Harry received a sharp reprimand for having taken it on himself to fall out.

"What the bloody hell did you mean by it?"

"I was hit."

"Don't see no sign of it."

"Well, I felt a smack." He was surprised there were no outward signs of a wound and that he felt none the worse. He had been told, however, that this was often the case. Men did not know when they were wounded, did not feel the loss of limb or fingers. It might be that the bullet was inside him—that, without giving any sign of it, he was bleeding to death. "I thought the fellow might get away."

"Another time you leave the thinkin' to me."

He walked off with the prisoner, and later, in the orderly tent, Sergeant Devlin was permitted to tell his tale. He sent a swift glance about for Harry, and was relieved to find that the trooper's evidence had not been thought necessary — that Captain Smee, young and fresh-com-

plexioned, was orderly officer for the day.

The tale that Devlin told was ingenuous. He had been traveller for a Sheffield firm, and, being up-country when war broke out had been seized by the Boers and, in spite of his protests, forced to remain with them. They were aware that at one time he had been a volunteer, and that consequently he knew his drill. Since then he had made various attempts to escape, but the burghers had been suspicious and he had had to be very careful. Today his chance had come and he had seized it.

He hoped, modestly, that he would be allowed to fight for his country. While he had been with the Boers he had not been idle, he had learned all he could in the hope that some day he might be able to turn it to account.

Captain Smee was impressed, but his dislike of responsibility made him hesitate. It would be better, perhaps, to hear what the Battalion Commander had to say.

Devlin was taken before a heavy man with little eyes set under grey bushes. He begged humbly for work, for an opportunity to prove himself.

The officer, glancing at Devlin, a smart and soldierly figure, saw he might be useful. He was so open in his offers of information that it did not occur to them he might have papers on him which would have been even more useful.

"Who brought him into camp?"

"Trooper King."

"The man surrendered to him?"

"Yes." They did not ask for King's account of the surrender.

"Where did he find him?"

"At Blauw Vlei."

"And we are a sergeant short!" He considered. "It's easier to keep your eye on an N.C.O. than a private — yes."

To the amazement of the troops, Devlin came back to them not only a free man, but a sergeant. He was to take the place of poor Sergeant Knight; had been put in authority over the very man who had taken him prisoner. Harry could hardly believe it.

That evening, when Devlin would have joined the circle about a camp fire a gruff voice forbade him: "Don't want no traitors 'ere," and it was the same elsewhere.

"The men are very quiet tonight," said Captain Smee

to the adjutant. "I haven't heard a single song." "Uneasy about something. It is always a bad sign when they bunch together and talk."

The men had gathered about Harry, who was telling again the story of Devlin's capture. As the sergeant approached, their voices, discussing it, died away; and they waited, in a pregnant silence, until he should be out of hearing.

He cursed them as he went. Boer or Englishman, they were nothing to him.

"Made him sergeant," said Harry in disgust, "when only this very morning the chap was potting at us from behind a wall? Beats creation, it does! Wonder what yarn he pitched them?"

"Whatever it was," said Bristow, "they swallowed it horns, hoofs, and all. If they aren't lambs!"

"He's been fighting for the Boers," said Harry. "And because he thinks it'll suit his book, he is going to pretend to fight for us."

"If he came to my shop," said Bristow, who had been a butcher, "I wouldn't give him credit for so much as a

pound of liver."

"He's turned his coat and he can turn it again. One of these days the regiment will find itself in Queer Street, and it'll be owing to our fine Boer sergeant. I know one thing - " he stared at the fire, "they'd better not detail me to go out with him."

II

De Heig Kranz was reported empty, deserted, but it was necessary to make sure. It lay just off the route the column was to take, lay convenient for a campingground. Sergeant Devlin was to ride on overnight and reconnoitre, and Trooper King was detailed to accompany him. If the place was suitable they were to make what preparations were possible for the comfort of the advancing column.

When the order reached him Harry was standing, one foot on a log, polishing his accourrements. He stood up, straightening himself so suddenly that Corporal Briggs took a step back.

"I'll go with any one else," said Harry, unaware that he had been detailed for this work as a man whose loyalty was above suspicion, a man who could be trusted to keep his eye on the specious Irishman, "but not with Devlin."

"You're not here to pick and choose who you'll go with!"

"He'll betray us to the Boers."

"It'll be up to you to see he doesn't."

Harry stood stiff and immovable.

"Come now," ordered Corporal Briggs, but the other did not stir. The men stared at each other with hard eyes, neither willing to yield. "Don't you know, you bloody fool, that disobedience on active service is mutiny?"

"Anybody but Devlin," repeated Harry. He had taken him prisoner; he knew the man was treacherous, that he had something up his sleeve. Trooper King could not pierce to Devlin's intention, but he misdoubted it and, misdoubting — not for himself but for the unsuspicious column riding into some death-trap — stood to his refusal.

The corporal changed his tone. King was the most exasperating chap he knew, yet he kept the men cheerful, also he fed them. A good man in his way, and Corporal Briggs did not want to get him into trouble.

"Look here, King," he said, "this won't do, you know.

It's Army discipline, and if a man can't knuckle under he gets the worst of it. I don't want to put you under arrest."

Harry's face was mulish; he had made up his mind.

"You know the penalty for disobeying orders?" A pause, but Trooper King's hard eyes still stared unblinkingly.

"You'll be shot."

He threw a note of pleading into his voice. Just for a notion — out of obstinacy — to be shot! It was silly. "Shot at dawn."

Trooper King's glance shifted. He looked down at the bare brown earth and he sighed; but he did not yield.

"I'm not going," he said.

III

So quickly had the situation arisen and developed that Harry was still dazed. Between men carrying fixed bayonets he had been taken to the guard-tent, there to remain until the morning. He had gone quietly, for as yet he hardly understood what had come to pass.

He understood better when he saw Bristow's face. The little man was openly distressed.

"Why did you go for to do it?" and "We can't spare you."

Spare him? Was it true, then, what Corporal Briggs had said?

The flap of the tent fell, cutting him off from the life of the camp, shutting out Bristow's red face.

He sat down and tried to understand.

For a time he could only listen. Sounds of stamping hoofs, of men whistling at their work, came from the horse-lines. Nearer was the beat of a steady tramp: a nan was doing sentry-go outside the tent.

It came home to him that he, Harry King, was under arrest.

Under arrest because he had refused to go with Devlin, with the man who shot at English soldiers from behind a wall!

He had meant to refuse and he had done it.

He had been right to refuse — oh, quite right. Strange that no one saw how right he was. Ten days previously Harry had been one of a firing-party detailed to shoot a deserter. He had watched the army surgeon pin over the heart of the blindfolded man the square of white paper at which they were to aim.

He had been profoundly sorry for the poor chap, but he had not refused to shoot.

A firing-party and he in the place of the deserter!

Bristow and Long and others, the men with whom he had slept and eaten, his comrades in arms, they would be sorry for him, but they would not refuse to shoot.

"They shan't blindfold me," he muttered.

IV

Harry, waiting outside the orderly-room tent with guard and witnesses, realized that he had probably only another day to live. His purpose in coming to South Africa smote him, and suddenly he smiled. The joke was on him.

Shoot him, would they? Well, he had come out to be shot.

A queer end to the business.

That touch of morning coolness made the sunshine

pleasant. He was attracted by the veld. A fine country! He would have liked to take up land and farm. His mother's people had been farmers—

"Right turn. Halt!"

They had taken off his cap — ah yes, a prisoner went in bareheaded. He was in the tent and the Colonel's little-gimlet eyes had picked him out — Private 1278, King, Henry. "Corporal, what have you to say?"

"Sir, on the night of the twenty-third instant I was instructed to tell off Trooper King to accompany Sergeant Devlin on a scouting expedition and Trooper King refused

to go."

"Refused to obey orders!" said the Colonel, lifting the little bushes over his eyes into a grey line of surprised displeasure. He took up the charge-sheet, read it over to himself, then read it aloud. "Private 1278, what have you to say for yourself?"

Harry's resonant voice quivered slightly; he was palpably ill at ease. "Sir, I took Sergeant Devlin prisoner. He's a turncoat Boer. I felt I couldn't go with him."

"It's not for you to decide what you will do," said the colonel sharply.

Captain Smee leaned over the table. "Sir, can I say

something -"

Colonel Ruthven signed to the sergeant-major to withdraw the prisoner, and Harry found himself back in the sunshine. It had grown warmer, not so pleasant.

"Orders must be obeyed," said the Colonel. "For the

sake of discipline - an example -"

But Captain Smee had not forgotten the fording of the Orange River. The circumstances of King's disobedience were, he thought, a little unusual. The man was brave enough; it was not as if he had funked going —

"Sure?" said Colonel Ruthven,

Captain Smee told his story, told of other exploits, explained that Harry was the most reckless daredevil in the regiment.

"Then, why?" said his commanding officer.

"I think it's something between the men."

" Ah!"

"King took the other prisoner. I dare say he feels that

Devlin ought not to have been put over him."

The little grey bushes twitched and the Colonel hesitated a moment, then shook his head. "We can't overlook it — too serious; man must be court-martialed. I'm sorry, Smee."

"I shall be sorry to lose him, sir."

"Humph — well — can't be helped." He made a final pronouncement. "Private 1278 to be sent to brigade Headquarters this afternoon under escort — sergeant and four men."

V

Brigade Headquarters was on the side of a hill, a solitary hill overlooking a wide and dusty plain. Villars Dorp nestled at the foot, and beyond were the half-brick, half-iron sheds of a railway-station to which the war had lent importance.

The tent which was to be Trooper King's prison had been erected on the top of the slope. Harry, taking possession of his quarters, felt them to be remote. On the top of the hill, on the roof of the world, he found himself a solitary and unconsidered atom, with time to burn.

He hoped it would not be long before the court martial

was held.

A day passed and another day, but nothing happened. Though his guards looked forbidding, he must question them; he could not go on like this,

He got but little satisfaction. They did not know and "he was a confounded nuisance, that's what he was. Why did he go disobeying orders? They hadn't come to South Africa to be policemen, no blooming fear!"

Harry watched the sun rise and set, watched it day after day for seven interminable weeks.

Overlooked by the authorities, who at the moment had something more important to think of than Trooper King, his needs were ill-supplied by those responsible for him. The food brought was scanty, consisting mainly of mealiepop, the water insufficient. Hard work dragging water up a hill, and one could not always remember —

Harry, who set cleanliness before godliness, poor Harry who had sacrificed his breeches rather than go verminous, had not enough water to drink, let alone wash.

He was verminous now.

The tent was insanitary; his stomach craved a change of diet, his body a change of linen; do what he would he could not keep clean.

To be shot was one thing, but to lie in dirt, to want food, to battle with shadowy creatures that grew in a night from stragglers into armies —

The foulness of disease had been a haunting terror, but this foulness of the body was worse, infinitely worse. The creeps! He had nothing to do but think of his sufferings. And he had brought this on himself!

He would not go with Devlin, would not help to betray the column. Devlin was a treacherous hound; he, Harry, had not been thinking of himself but of his unsuspicious mates. But no one realized that, no one understood, and there was no one to whom he could go with his story.

The soldiers in charge of him had been unfriendly, but as the weeks passed they became merely indifferent. They neglected him. He was "an extra fatigue." He might have been a stone, a bridgehead.

A diet of mealie-pop is not sustaining. Harry lost strength, grew haggard and unkempt.

To carry on day after day in this squalor! Talk of hell-fire — that would at least be cleansing. Nothing could live in it. The grey and shining companies would shrivel, blacken, his foul body be refined away, only the metal of the spirit remain. He laughed and stretched out his arms.

What a number of moments were in a single day! how it dragged and dragged! Men were callous brutes. You tried to help, you gave yourself for your fellows, and in return they tortured you. They did not care, no one cared; there was no one to whom you could appeal. In the distance a machine was working, was grinding out government and army discipline and justice; presently he would be caught up like a grain of corn and ground between the noisy stones, and no one would hear his protest, not one.

And still the sun rose and the sun set. The brawn on Harry's arm was melting away, he was nearly thin enough to scare the crows.

He could not remember how long he had been on the hill-top, how long he had been fighting the grey and shining hordes —

If they would only put him out of his misery!

VI

Harry in camp and on the march had been a personality, and Captain Smee looked daily for news of his fate.

The result of the court martial should have been reported to him. He hoped Harry had not been shot. It was not as if he had struck the N.C.O.

A week went by and still no news. It was odd! Smee remembered that an old schoolfellow of his — Willy Nolan — was stationed at Villars Dorp. He would be sure to know how the case had gone.

Smee was orderly officer again and too busy to write, but as soon as he had time —

Nolan would make it his business to find out what had become of Private 1278. At school they had called him "Nosey" because he had nosed out everything a boy wanted to keep hidden. He had had a handsome handle to his face, a good door-knocker of a nose, but he wasn't "Nosey" because of that.

Smiling over recollections of old days at Cheeley, Captain Smee had opened the purple blotter his sister had given him before he left home and, poising it on his knee, had written to Nolan. Would "Nosey find out what had happened to a man — Private King — who had been sent to Villars Dorp on the 28th of last month to be courtmartialled for disobedience to orders? The circumstances were peculiar; he, Captain Smee, was interested in the man and thought him not altogether to blame."

On receipt of the letter Captain Nolan's glance had leaped the pages. "Old Smee out here? Well I never! What's this —?"

He made inquiries but no one seemed to have heard of Private King; there was no such person at Villars Dorp. A tiny place, and he would know if there were. He wrote briefly to Captain Smee, then stumbled by accident upon the tent.

"Hullo! Hullo! What's this?"

A prisoner? — A Boer prisoner? Oh, English, was he? And why was he there? Awaiting court martial? How long had he been awaiting it? Seven weeks? Good God!

Disregarding the protests of the soldier on guard, Nolan threw back the flap of the tent.

"Phew!"

From the shadows of that vile, uncleanly hole Harry's face looked out at him, Harry's eyes.

Nolan saw a white disk and those eyes.

VII

The finding of the court martial was that Private 1278 should have obeyed orders. The time to enter a complaint was after the orders had been carried out. Taking into consideration, however, that Private 1278's intentions had been good — that he believed Sergeant Devlin to be in sympathy with the enemy — and that he had already suffered seven weeks' imprisonment, the Court ruled that he should forthwith be returned to his unit.

Harry, enfeebled by confinement, only understood that he was not to be shot.

His appearance, gaunt to emaciation, had told in his favour. Captain Nolan, who had taken up the case and was defending him, had managed to confuse the issues. He had described the lousy blankets, the tent, the food, the condition in which he had found the prisoner; and the good men and true, Trooper King's judges, had looked at him and with rumblings in their throats had blamed—well, whoever was to blame. The matter must be inquired into; it was scandalous.

After all, though, the man had disobeyed orders. Oh yes, they would take his condition into consideration, they would let him off as lightly as they could. Still, if private soldiers were to be allowed to refuse duty it would be the end of discipline. Let King go back to the bat-

talion, let him be put under Sergeant Devlin, let him find out by observation that the man was no traitor.

The Boer sergeant had been weighed in the balance by those competent to judge. They had pronounced him worthy to serve under the British flag and the court upheld their decision. Time would prove the wisdom of it, time would impress on Trooper King's mind the folly of thinking he knew better than his superior officers.

Harry stumbled out of the farmhouse in which the court martial had been held. Upon his limbs the sun struck warmly, and he was glad of the warmth. The dust blew across the plain in dull red clouds but it did not annoy. He was free of the tent, of its semi-darkness, of its evil conditions, and he was not to be shot.

He had had seven weeks of hell; he had paid, his judges thought, the penalty for his stubbornness. Of their mercy they had overlooked his fault and were sending him back to his regiment, back to the front. The sky was a blue arch and, within limits, he might come and go under it as he would. He drew deep breaths. He was content — he was more than content, he was glad.

Yet there had been something -

He wrinkled his forehead trying to remember. Yes, yes — something. He had it. The court martial had sent him back to be under Devlin.

Under Devlin?
Of their mercy —

VIII

From the upper windows of Byl Kranz Boers had fired on the passing rooineks. Foolish of them, for otherwise the soldiers would have gone their way without damaging house or property. As it was, a lesson had to be writ in characters of fire across the farm and Sergeant Devlin had been dispatched to write it.

Among the men who received orders to acompany him was Trooper King, and this time he made no objection. The seven weeks at Villars Dorp had broken him to the necessity for obedience. Whatever happened now, he would not rebel.

The Boer farmer had defended his home to the last. He lay across the threshold, his beard white as the whitened stone. Harry was sorry for him. After all, the old man had built the house and it was his —

He should not have fired upon the soldiers — certainly not. But why should the two countries be at war? Why should not the remaining summers of that busy life have been spent in the peace of man as well as of God?

The flames were devouring the house he had built, devouring his life-work, devouring him.

Harry became aware that Devlin was shouting to him. What did the fellow want? He was ingenious, Devlin. If there were anything you disliked doing he saw it fell on you. Harry on his way back from Villars Dorp had made up his mind that whatever he had to bear should be borne with Indian stoicism; the toad, to all appearances, should enjoy being under the harrow.

He had had need of his stoicism.

Devlin was rejoiced to have him back. Mother of Christ, but it was pleasant to have a man under you whom it was your bounden duty to plague. Between marches, between fights, a congenial ocupation to think out what you would do next, what you would say; it made one feel good.

A pity the victim did not squeal, but a clever prick, a clever twist, and he might. Saxons were stolid, but they must have their vulnerable spots.

On this occasion, however, Devlin's mind was running on something of more importance than vulnerable spots, something that concerned himself and the future.

He had come to South Africa to make money. He meant to buy the land his father farmed, the stony fields between the brown bog and the hills. By hook or by crook he must earn enough.

And the Saxon was a goose who laid golden eggs.

The Boer was too slim; hard as Dublin streets, the Boer! Devlin was glad to be fighting on the side of the English. Sooner or later his opportunity would arise, the money he wanted be within his grasp.

He fancied the time had come. The golden egg was to be found on this lonely farm, but before he seized it he must make sure of Harry.

Harry wasn't to be trusted. Unless he stood to make something out of the deal he wouldn't be safe.

Devlin raised his voice, shouting so that Harry heard above the roar of the flames.

Though reluctant to come within reach of the sergeant, he moved in his usual quick, effortless way. Before the noise of Devlin's great voice had ceased Harry was beside him. "They're driving off the cattle. I want you to take Billy Deans and cut round by the stream. They haven't got far."

Harry moved as if to set off without delay, but Devlin detained him.

"The cattle are to be rounded up and driven into camp." He looked hard into the other's face and found it inscrutable.

"Look here, King," he pointed to a fringe of trees at a distance, "that is the border — Basutoland. Of course, we must take some of the mob into camp —"

So that was Devlin's game - cattle-duffing! But what

Devlin did was his affair, not Harry's. A soldier's duty was to obey orders. He might enter a protest—if he survived and when it was too late, but meanwhile his superior officers would do the thinking for him. Well—they might! Clever chaps his superior officers; they had swallowed Devlin's story and made him a sergeant and their precious sergeant was robbing them right and left!

"The rest you and Deans can drive over the border.

I'll see you get your share --"

Harry stood before Devlin neither assenting nor refusing, and the Irishman cursed his British phlegm. But if he handed over the cattle —

"Take them to those trees and wait with them till two men come up to you. Ask their names, and if they say

'Budden' it's all right. Got it?"

"Budden — if they say the name is Budden," repeated Harry, and turned away. Devlin looked after him for a moment. He could not guess what King was thinking. Queer chap that, so unexpected. You might have thought he would have been glad of a little easy money. But whatever you did or said, it was the same. He set up a blank wall — a wall that was both high and impenetrable; do what you would you could not tell what was happening on the other side.

When Devlin got the money he would pay Harry a share, a small share. So far the man had only obeyed

orders, but once the coins were in his hand -

Five beasts were brought into camp, and Devlin explained to Captain Smee that the Boers had got off with the rest. "Byl Kranz is very close to the border, sir."

Some days later Harry straightened himself after balancing a billy-can on one corner of the fire to the peril of other precariously poised pots, to find Devlin at his elbow. The footsteps of the sergeant had been deadened

by the noise of the camp, and for some moments he had stood looking on.

"Well done yourself!" he cried. A light deft touch, so useful!

"D'you want me?"

"Brought you this." He held out his hand. "Your share, King."

The firelight touched the coins in Devlin's hand, and

Harry glanced from them to the swarthy face.

"Not for me!" said he, and stepped back a pace. "I won't touch a farthing of your dirty money."

Devlin ceased to smile. "You've - earned it."

"I carried out your orders."

"On the understanding you had your bit of the plunder."

"No!" He flicked his fingers as if cleansing them.

For a moment Devlin's blood ran cold. His eyes questioned Harry and got no answer. Always the wall between them. "You'll peach?"

Harry's turn to smile — a bitter, disillusioned smile. "Not my business; between them they've taught me that. You can go ahead, you can rob them all you like. It's

nothing to me."

"Sound wisdom!" said the other. "But the money?" It clinked agreeably in his hand. "Well, if you won't," he slipped it into his pocket, "there's others aren't so particular." Even those few pounds would make a difference.

He began to whistle: "My father and mother were Irish." The world was a good place, and overseas was a whitewashed cottage with thatched roof and an earthen floor; he would buy it and rebuild it and enlarge it. "Never say I didn't offer to settle with you."

Harry lifted the lid from a bubbling pot. "Don't you fret, we'll settle our accounts some day."

IX

Sick parade was nearly over and, as if to emphasize the happy moment, the smell of hot coffee, of bacon, was flowing out of the mess-tent. Hard lines that Captain Minns, who was so fond of his bed, should have to take sick parade before breakfast; any other time in the day, but — before breakfast! Really, it was a bit rough on a fellow.

"Any more?" he asked of the orderly.

"Trooper King, sir, for a bottle of medicine."

"King? Oh, yes." He rummaged among his papers. "I'll see him."

Harry, burned by sun and wind, hardened by life in the open, Harry at the top of his strength, entered the tent. The hungry surgeon eyed him with approval.

"Last time I saw you I took a specimen of your blood."
There had been some foolery with a drop of blood and a tube, but Harry had not understood why the blood was taken.

"The report came yesterday. You will be glad to know that you need not come for any more medicine—you are perfectly well."

"Perfectly well?" said Harry; and something so deep in him it seemed to lie under everything else vibrated. But Captain Minns was talking nonsense. How could he, Harry, be well? He was suffering from an incurable disease.

"Your blood has been tested and there wasn't a trace. You are as well today as you have ever been."

"But—" He dared not even begin to believe. Disappointment was awaiting him round the corner. He must not, no, he must not think what it would mean to him if—if it were true. "But—"

"Yes? What's the difficulty?"

"Is it possible?"

Captain Minns clapped him on the shoulder. "The proof of the pudding is in the eating."

The little tremulous hope had shot up out of the deeps. His father, other men — could they have been mistaken?

"I thought you couldn't get over it, that it was always there, ready to break out —"

Captain Minns looked at him thoughtfully. "You have been suffering from a fever," he said. "The only difference between that and other fevers is that it lasts longer. Rheumatic, scarlet, enteric — they can all damage a man; so can this fever, but you have been lucky. I do not think — mind you, I don't know for certain, I can only tell you what I think — but I don't fancy you will suffer from any after-effects."

"How is that?"

"You've sweated the poison out of you by the hard life you have been leading. Also, of course, you have taken the medicine regularly."

Harry was smiling foolishly; his eyes were bright, his mouth had fallen open. Yes, the surgeon was sincere, he meant what he said.

"I'm cured!" Harry repeated it to himself as if the words had a peculiar sweetness and he were savouring it. "I'm cured — cured —"

"You're as sound a man," said Captain Minns, rising, "as sound a man, barring the little bother with your mitral valve, as I could wish to see."

X

Harry, dismissed, had walked away and had continued walking. It was more natural to put one foot before the

other, to go on, than to stand still. He had not room in his soul for more than his simple, his wide, his tremendous happiness. He had offered his poor and tainted life and, behold, it had been given back to him, given back whole. He was to live, not die. His feet carried him beyond-the camp, beyond the sights of it, beyond the sounds; they brought him to a quiet place, to a greenness of plants and singing of water. He threw himself down by the stream; and the ripple of the water was bright and the sides of the leaves, even the little stones. Ripple and leaf and stone — he gazed at them and smiled at them and forgot.

The sense of deep relief had been contained in him like wine in a crystal goblet. He was Trooper King, a creature apart from other creatures, an individual; but as he lay on the edge of the water in the warmth and the stillness, the crystal walls that had hemmed in his personality thinned until they were become a part of the circumambient air, until the golden light of his happiness was dif-

fused through space.

The war and his life as Trooper King dwindled to a black speck. He was stretching out to something beyond these carnal manifestations. The black speck grew smaller, it had been and it was no more. Harry was no longer an individual; he was one with the force that casts itself in starry systems across the void, that moves as the tiny ameeba in a woodland pool. He was of God.

XI

[&]quot;Show a leg! Show a leg!"
Early morning in the camp at Roberts's Heights.

[&]quot;Go to hell!"

[&]quot;Well, then, show a leg."

"Oh, go to hell!"

"Come now, no more of it; show a leg!"

The regiment was waiting to be demobilized. Peace had been proclaimed and the greater number of the men were returning to England, but a few, and King among them, intended to remain in Africa. The Government had proclaimed that a grant of land would be made to any soldier who was prepared to take up farming.

Trooper King did not know much about the conditions that obtained in Africa but he could learn. No doubt the State would help — would dig down into its jeans for the intending settler, give him seed and implements, loan him enough money to buy a few head of cattle. After he, King, had collected two outstanding debts he would go down to Pretoria and claim the land which he had been promised.

Meanwhile the debts obsessed him. The toad had to settle with the harrow. No longer was it sergeant and private, but one man and another. Pigeonholed in his mind was the memory of a hundred trifling indignities, the pin-pricks inflicted by a cunning mind on one adjudged his enemy and at his mercy. Harry longed for the settlement of that account.

To reimburse himself with the moneys of which a grateful country, in return for years of volunteered service, had mulcted him was less important, but should in turn have his attention.

Devlin came first. Harry remembered his fight with Ewen Nasmyth. Then he had been out to kill; he had felt that Nasmyth must be wiped off the face of the earth. But this was different. He was going to humiliate Devlin as he, Harry, had been humiliated; he was going to thrash him within an inch of his life and yet leave him that life. The man should live on and remember. Long life to him!

The regiment had been ordered to parade. Colonel Ruthven, no great speaker, had uttered a few inspiriting commonplaces, had told them to be good boys, and had dismissed them. Harry, listening, cheering his late commanding officer, had yet kept an eye on Devlin. The Irishman was a slippery customer, he might yet escape.

The men scattered to draw their pay and collect their belongings. Their mood was holiday. They thought of beer in tankards, of crowded streets and of the welcome

they would receive, and they were going home.

Sergeant Devlin was in as gay a mood. Many a good steer had he sent across the border! The proceeds were lying at a Cape Town bank; they lay there, a fat sum—enough to buy the little farm on the edge of the bog, the long, low cottage in which he had been reared. The picture of heather-clad hills, the hills his opening eyes had rested on every morning of his young life, was more real to him than the green veldt and the ridges of rock. He strode along whistling his favourite tune:

My father and mother were Irish And I am Irish too.

When he had been home a wee while he would marry; he would have a tail of boys, he would bring them up to agitate for Irish freedom. He had done his bit for the old country and he wanted to settle down. His boys should carry on the work.

I bought a wee fiddle for ninepence And it is Irish too.

No haunting melodies today, no "Wearing of the Green," but the lilt he would be singing in the good nights to come

when the peat was smouldering red on the open hearth and his little old mother —

From behind a kopje came Harry King, stepping lightly. The Irishman saw his purpose with a twang of nerves. He had forgotten Harry.

"Going home?" said he, with a glance to right and left. What for was he stravaiging over the veldt when he should have been in his quarters packing? And — Holy Mother! — why was King carrying a riding-switch?

"The corps has been disbanded," said Harry grimly, and now, Devlin, it's man to man. I promised I'd settle

with you when the time came."

"If you've anything agin me," blustered the other, drawing himself up to his full height. He was the sergeant, the man in authority. He dared Harry to attack him.

"Of course I've nothing," said Harry, "not a single extra fatigue! Oh, no — and you've never thrown it up at me!" A procession of black, distorted memories crossed his mind; they were black but they changed slowly to red.

"What I did as sergeant—" He would fight if he must. After all, he hated Harry; he would enjoy knocking him down and kicking him.

"Tell that to the Marines!"

"'Tis a fight, then?" He had the stomach for it and his boots were heavy.

"I could fight you, you black bastard, with one hand," cried Harry, "but you'd lie down and howl for mercy." He bent the switch in his hands, and suddenly Devlin recognized it as his. His riding-switch? "I'm going to take it out of your hide with this, I'm going to see you have your stripes."

"Give me that whip."

Harry threw it on the rocks at his side. "All in good time," said he and met the sergeant's rush with a straight left jab. A right and left to the jaw and Devlin dropped. But Harry had not done with him. A stripe for every extra fatigue, stripes for that gibing tongue, and then the man might have his whip; he might carry it home with him, keep it as a trophy.

"You'd hit a man when he's down?"

"Don't you make any mistake. I told you this wasn't a slam. Come on or I'll kick you up. You're getting the pay you've earned and I'm handing it out to you."

A pity Captain Smee and the others could not see their fine sergeant — see him cringe! Harry gave him what he'd earned, then flung the whip at him and walked away.

One debt discharged.

That night there was a stir in the horse-lines. When morning came it was discovered that two of the Basuto ponies were missing, they and their equipment. By that time Harry was on his way to Pretoria. He had drawn from his pocket a shiny black notebook and the stub of a pencil. He smiled to himself, murmuring a total, and at the bottom of a column of figures, now almost illegible, he wrote in the clear roundhand of the drawing-office the word "Paid."

"OU'VE come to ask for a grant of land?" In the office a man with a burned skin and irongrey hair looked up from the letter he was writing. His dark eyes ran swiftly over Harry, appraising him —" Another hungry Britisher!"

"I believe I have qualified for one."

"Where were you born? Who are your parents? What is your claim? Are you an African?"

"No, English, discharged from the Army." He pro-

duced his papers.

De Groot shook his head. "Nothing doing."

"I was told I had only to apply -- "

"Oh, the land is there all right." He pointed to markings on a map, and Harry wondered why he should look as if he were enjoying himself. "The land is there all right, but it's for Boers."

"For Boers?" A trickle of feeling, like a run of hot blood, crept over his brain. "But we fought them and licked them. Do you mean to tell me the grants are for

them?"

"A paternal Government," said the Civil Servant, "is giving the land to those who took part in the war," he paused and smiled at Harry, "—those born in Africa."

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" His farming plans went by

the board. "Then it's no go?"

The other slightly moved his shoulders. "The place is hotching with foreigners."

"Foreigners?" said Harry. "Is that what we are?"

"Well, you aren't a native here, are you? You come from another country, another continent, and you come for what you can get. Personally, I don't think there's room—"

"Not room - in Africa?"

"We want it," said the Africander, his grin frankly hostile, "for ourselves."

"By gum," cried Harry, "you don't want much!" and went out into streets that for the first time struck him as unfriendly.

He took the next train to Johannesburg. The town was studded with the offices of mining companies, and a man who had served seven years' apprenticeship to an engineering firm ought not to have any difficulty in obtaining work. With hope renewed he turned into the Corner House, but a busy clerk referred him to the mine manager, and told him that if there were any jobs going, they were the people who would know.

Any jobs going? There must be jobs. The Corner

House was a huge concern.

Harry travelled out to the nearest mine and called on the manager. Hender Thomas was glad of a talk about England. He was from Camborne, and had the Cornishman sent to him every week. How were things doing down in the West? As to a job at the Van Tromp mine, he shook his head. The workings were flooded. The company was discharging, not taking on men. In fact, mining was in a bad way.

"Can't you find me some sort of a job?"

"There are a skite of people with good qualifications looking for work —"

"I can't understand it. After a war there must be a lot of rebuilding and speeding up to be done?"

"Oh, in the future, yes; but at the moment we have got to shake down and sort ourselves. I'm afraid there are hard times coming for some."

"Are you telling me that with a trade at my finger-tips

I shan't be able to earn my living?"

"Just that."

"Well, I'm damned!"

"If I were you, Mr. King, I should take the next ship to England."

Harry shook his head and his face set in stubborn lines.

"I'll give this country a go first," he said.

II

Doggedly Harry quartered Johannesburg, but everywhere he found that the companies of the out-of-work had preceded him. He left no door untried, he was as energetic as a terrier in pursuit of a rat, but no one seemed in need of his services. His papers were in order, he had recommendations from every firm that had employed him, but mining-house after mining-house turned him down. Places of business, offices, shops - no vacancies! His feet grew sore with beating the streets in his fruitless search. The gold in his pockets changed into silver, and that melted until he had not the wherewithal to keep life in his craving body. Bitter days for Harry! He had no friends in Johannesburg, not even an acquaintance, and he was on his beam-ends. For a fortnight he was penniless, sleeping out, drinking at the public fountain, tightening his belt over an empty stomach. Poor Harry! Eyes bright with hunger and the heavy bones of his face standing out in a fierce protest. The only people to realize he was starving were outcasts like himself, and during that fortnight what food he had was the gift of prostitute and felon.

Bit by bit Harry's possessions had disappeared. He clung to the wallet that held his papers, clung also to the shiny black notebook which had borne witness to the ingratitude of "England, mighty mother." The notebook was at that period something of a comfort to the poor fellow, for he was able to enter in it vague accounts of the situation.

"What a desperate feeling I have about things generally! The awful loneliness of it all! O God, that I should have come to this—torture, despair, a derelict! Read I can't; hope I can't; struggle I can't."

That day he made money in a drinking-bar by a lucky bet. Had he lost he would have been unable to pay. He had been certain, however, that he would win. He bought

with the money a thimble-rigging outfit!

"The difference," wrote Harry in the shiny black notebook, "between the fellow who succeeds and the one who fails is that the one gets up and chases after the man who needs him and the other sits and waits to be hunted up."

Pleased with that, he wrote under it, "Very true."

Yet he did not so much chase after men who needed him as insist to any and every one he met that he was the fellow who could make the business, the show, the mine in which they were interested a success.

In consequence of these tactics, during the next four

years he played many parts.

He walked on at a theatre; he toured the country with a circus as one of the Saxon Brothers, boxers and strong men; he got a job as engineer in a gold-mine; he was upcountry on a farm. Eventually he went into business with a man named McFarlane. The said McFarlane was

the owner of two stores and required a partner; it was arranged that Harry should manage one and that they should share the profits. He took the partnership in happy-go-lucky fashion, signed a deed without bothering to read it through, and only after he had put in six months' work did he learn that the stores were mortgaged.

"He is a fool," wrote Harry in the notebook, "who when he bumps facts does not recognize them. I've been

careless."

He closed the store, said good-bye to Juliana van Grutten, the owner of the nearest farm — a young Dutchwoman who had shown him hospitality — and started for McFarlane's house. He was not sorry to leave. Juliana's father and brothers had been killed in the war and she had offered to make him manager of the farm. From manager to husband is but a step, and Harry by this time knew that he didn't want to settle in the Orange River Colony as a farmer. But Juliana had cooked him wonderful hot suppers! He did not refuse her offer. It was his duty to settle with McFarlane, then he would see.

He was not sorry to shut down the store. Though he had tasted the pleasure of making money, he found that sitting at the receipt of custom was dull work. During the six months he had grown restless at times, as the notebook bore witness, even depressed.

"Sick and weary of it all."

"After getting into bed last night felt the same old feeling of depression."

"Miserable scabby lot in this neighbourhood, disgusted

with them!"

"Weary, weary weary."

He rode off with a light heart and a merry. McFarlane had cheated him and must be punished. It was his,

Harry's, duty to bring him to justice. The man was a menace to society; he must be discredited!

Unfortunately for Harry's purpose, McFarlane had a wife and children, and to punish the man in purse and reputation would have injured them. When could Harry resist the appeal of weakness? He gave the man a thrashing and did not prosecute.

His next essay proved more satisfactory. With the revival of trade and agriculture came a demand for every sort of tool and machine. Harry saw his chance. He and another engineer, pooling their resources, sent a carefully considered order to a firm in Birmingham, to another in Sheffield. They knew what the Transvaal required, they knew where the goods could be obtained; and from the beginning the firm of King and Cavendish prospered. The difficulty was capital. So good were the prospects of the young firm, however, that Harry felt justified in asking his father to lend him five hundred pounds.

By return of mail came a draft for the amount.

But the same mail brought a letter from James. The family thought Harry had no business to take advantage of the old man's generosity. Five hundred pounds was a large sum, and Harry's ventures had not hitherto proved successful. Though the family hoped he would have better luck in the future—

"Back it goes!" said Harry furiously, and returned it with grateful thanks.

Not a word more.

Nice brotherly act on the part of James to twit him with his lack of success! A fellow might be butted all over the ring for nineteen rounds yet land on the solar plexus of the proposition on the twentieth.

Just like James not to be able to see an inch before his nose! Why, there was a fortune in this tool business. If Richard had been in England —

It occurred to him that Richard was, like himself, in Africa, that he was at the other end of the big pear-shaped

bit of land. He had not thought of it before.

A pity they would not lend him the five hundred pounds. Without capital he could not make the little business into a big one, and what was a trickle of orders when you should be having a river of them?

"Oh, there's a fortune in it all right," he said to Cav-

endish, "but not for me."

He peddled ploughshares and knives, steel goods and ironmongery, for a few months longer; but he was growing restless.

"Look here, Cavendish," he said at last, "I've had enough of it. You can keep the business. I want to be off."

Cavendish had more patience; he was the dogged Englishman; he would not weary of the slow building which would bring so many of the things the heart of man desires.

"How about the name - King and Cavendish?"

"Let it stay as it is. After all, it was my idea."

Today the firm is mighty in the land of Ham, a monument of peaceful penetration, and Cavendish is a great man; but Harry has never regretted his decision.

"I'd have gone mouldy, grown moss on me, if I'd stayed

any longer."

But it pleases him to see the name. "Yes — King and Cavendish — just one of my ideas."

III

Richard King, on a Government launch, was running down to meet his brother. Harry had written to say he was coming via Delagoa Bay, through Suez, past the salt lakes of Ismailia, and so to Port Said. He had neglected to say that he was travelling steerage.

Richard was full of pleasant anticipations. He would be glad to see Harry, to take him round and give him a good time. During the last few years the family had scattered. Bet was in Buenos Ayres with her husband and Nancy in Canada. The Codger was married, and that seemed to have lifted him out of the family circle as completely as if he had gone to heaven. Richard was vaguely aware that though the life he led suited him, though he was on the whole content, the tumultuous family circle in the old home had been more stimulating. He missed, in the polish of his later days, the rough sincerity of brothers and sisters. He was really very glad that Harry was coming to stay with them.

It didn't matter what Ethel thought.

There were the four children. Harry was such a favourite with children. He, Richard, would enjoy showing him the baby. Fine little chap the baby, a King every inch of him—

That must be the ship!

So eager was he that he nearly overlooked Harry, in the steerage — Harry, who, not expecting to be met, was standing farewell drinks to the friends he had made during the voyage. It was he who, glancing up, caught sight of Richard interviewing the captain. Mr. Henry King? The captain did not remember the name. No, he wasn't on board, must have missed the boat. The Government

official, the Government launch, did not suggest the steerage.

Richard saw Harry coming swiftly down the deck, Harry looking as if he had had a rough-and-tumble voyage. The captain also saw him.

"Er - in the third class - " said he.

"Oh," said Richard lightly, as he grasped the situation, "my brother is very eccentric."

"Same old crackpot," he said, as they shook hands, "and why couldn't you travel like a Christian? I nearly missed you."

"Seemed a pity to waste the money."

"Well — get your things and come along. We've a dinner-party on tonight, and I'm in a hurry. I say, I'm

jolly glad to see you, old man."

"Same here." They plunged into comfortable talk, and it seemed to Harry only a few minutes before he was following Richard into a cool and spacious house, Richard's house.

"You do yourself well," he said, aware of himself as very much the younger brother. He was the rolling stone, that, as it rolled, touched earth with every side of it, with every bit of its surface — that was a humble thing, kicked on by chance. Richard was different; he was rooted, a plant, and he had grown to a stately height. Wonderful man, Richard.

"I say, Dick, about that dinner-party!"

" Well? "

"I haven't any dress clothes."

Richard considered. "You'll have to wear my old suit."

"It would trail on the ground!"

"I'll ask Ethel about it. And look here, Henry, the Sirdar is coming and people like that. They may be useful in getting you a job. You try and interest them."

"All right," said Harry cheerfully.

When, an hour later, they went to dress, Richard delayed his brother for a moment.

"You haven't seen my youngest."

"I was going to ask you - "

"The nursery is here."

They found the baby in his bath, a healthy youngster with the clear skin of the Kings. He turned long blue eyes on his uncle and decided to smile. Harry held out a hand and with a thrill felt little fingers close about his thumb and cling.

"What lunch-hooks he's got; there's strength for you!"
He pulled gently, and the baby, clinging, rose a little in the water. "He's going to be a fighter, that one. Wish I could have the training of him. That's right, punch your old uncle, hit him hard. What's his name, Dick?"

. "Henry."

"You don't say so?" The thrill again. What a jolly youngster, and he was Richard's! The luck some people had! Well, time enough.

"Henry," too. Another Harry King! It made you feel queer to think of it. "I must cross his hand."

Ethel had come in and was looking on. Her brother-in-law turned to her. "Are you superstitious?"

"Not more than other people."

He took some coins out of his pocket and, selecting a sovereign bearing the date 1905, crossed the baby's pink palm with it. "You must take the first sock he wore; have you got it?"

" Oh, yes."

"Put this talisman in it and keep it till he's old enough to know its value. Look!" He showed a sovereign minted in 1874. "Not a day passes but I turn this over two or three times. Influence is a factor in our lives of which we know nothing. The stars, this coin, I don't know how it may influence my life."

Richard moved impatiently. The queer chap that Harry was with his half-savage beliefs! And Ethel was looking impressed. She would put the coin in the sock and keep it for baby Henry. Trust a woman!

"Come along or we shall never be ready."

IV

The women had left the men to their cigars and wine.

"Person from the office, sir," said the dark servant at Richard's elbow; "says he will not keep you long."

"Tell him," said Richard softly, "to go to hell and wait for me there."

"He says the mail goes out tonight, sir."

Richard resigned himself. His guests would excuse him. His subordinate was fresh from England, did not yet know the ropes.

He dispatched the business — it was, after all, of slight importance — and returned. As he opened the door he was conscious that the hum of general conversation had ceased, that one resonant voice was dominating the room. What was Harry saying?

"I had no food that day or the next, then a bitch who'd come down to selling matches in the street spoke to me. 'Hullo, my old toe-rag,' says she, 'you look as if you'd bumped the rock.' I wasn't asking help, mind you—sooner died—but when she spoke to me I nearly broke down. Not a word, not a kindness, not a bit of bread for me in all Johannesburg—"

The prosperous gentlemen who sat at ease about the table were listening like children to a tale. Circumstances

had railed them off from the herd, from contact with the harsh surface of life. Harry, outcast, scallawag, who had done dubious things and known dubious people, was like the troubadour paying for bed and supper with a song of fascinating adventure. They asked him questions, seeing the Boer War through the eyes of a private, listening to stories of Devlin, of cattle-duffing, of Johannesburg in war and peace.

On the way home the greatest among them said that Richard King was a good fellow, a thoroughly decent chap, "but that brother of his, if he were given a chance

he might do something."

When Richard brought Harry's qualifications under the notice of those who were making the new Egypt he found no difficulty in getting him a job. He knew himself to be a popular man; and, of course it was that. They were glad to oblige him by finding his brother work.

"They've given you the Port Sudan job, Henry. It will be a fine thing for you, getting in here. Egypt is

going ahead."

Harry's slanting eyes considered him. "I can do with little old Egypt for a bit," said he, "but I'm not your kind, Dick. I'm not here for keeps."

Richard looked disappointed. What a pity Harry never stuck to anything! "A rolling stone —"

"And moss is money?" Yes, it would be pleasant to send home five thousand pounds for James to invest, teach him to call other people unsuccesssful, still - "Fact is, I don't really want it. I - I - want -"

"What do you want?"

"Oh, just to knock about." He was aware of his need as a wind that drove him before it, but he could not put it into words. Life was disappointing; he filled his belly with husks and they were not satisfying. Once, long ago, he had found something he could do, something that had left him content. They had called it degrading, brutalizing, and he had let them turn him from it; but, ever since, he had been searching, searching—

Richard would not understand.

At Port Sudan he put up a crane, and the attendant difficulties kept him interested until they had been solved. The crane was one of his finest pieces of engineering work. In token of approval the Government gave him other jobs. He built barracks for them and then a wharf, and finally was sent to Khartoum to inaugurate a water-supply.

"You are safe now for a clear £800 a year," said Richard.

"Never monkeyed with waterworks before," said Harry; "it will be an experience."

"A little influence is a useful thing."

"You and your influence! They saw me put up that crane."

Richard heard no more of Harry for some time. He could congratulate himself on having steered the rolling stone into a good berth. When writing home he said that Harry appeared to have settled down, and Mr. King, who since his son had come unscathed through the Boer War, regarded him as "spared," wondered if it could be true. Had Harry's hour struck? had he settled down like Richard, like James? An answer to prayer; and he, the boy's father, would be — yes, of course he would be — glad.

He need not have feared. One morning, when Richard reached the office he found Harry in possession.

"Finished," said he.

"Well — but they've appointed you the engineer in charge of the waterworks."

"Soft job; any old Mary Ann could run it now."

"You're not going to jack it up?"

"Done it!"

Richard sat back in dismay. "What next?"

"I've a fancy for the goldfields, then I might go on to New Zealand."

"You're hopeless."

"Send you the first nugget I find."

"When are you sailing?"

"Tomorrow, on the Bremen. If you know anybody out there, you might give me an introduction."

"All right. You will stay the night with us?"

"Thanks, old man, but I won't. Ethel had enough of me last time. I've lived rough and I don't take kindly to dressing for dinner and that. Besides, I want to see Cairo - the Cairo you've never seen. Get a batch of introductions ready and I'll call for them in the morning."

Richard hesitated. He would have liked to cut officialdom and make a night of it, and Harry, seeing his hesitation, grinned. "Not all beer and skittles being a respectable member of society. Eh, what? Lordy, I'm glad

I'm a tough."

"You wait," said Richard.

O bright was the sunshine that Harry King, following his host from the garden into the shadowy drawing-room, found it difficult to distinguish the forms and faces of those sitting there. He walked blindly in the wake of Philip Madden until he found that he had been led up to a black-and-gold sofa on which lay Philip Madden's invalid wife.

The gloom of the long room was changing to twilight, a clear dark twilight, and in it, softly yet sufficiently defined, were the figures of other women. He heard Mrs. Madden's "Mr. King — Miss Holden, Miss Kitty Gray."

The girls were pouring out tea. If he did not help them they would think him a lout, yet he felt awkward. The woman on the sofa, the woman with the bright eyes in a dead face, was looking at him thoughtfully; her look was piercing, and something in him shrank.

The room and the people affected him strangely, made him feel out of things and young.

He wasn't young now, he was over thirty. Perhaps he felt out of things because he had just come from the Australian gold-fields, from the rough open life.

He went across to the girls. Kitty Gray was in nurse's uniform. She turned laughing eyes on him, welcoming his help. A nice little thing and pretty. He felt instantly at home with her.

"I hope you play tennis, Mr. King?"

"I do, but I haven't either racquet or shoes with me."

"I think we can supply them. Margaret and I were just wishing some one would drop in to make up a set."

Miss Holden's name, then, was Margaret. It seemed to him that he had been aware of her as soon as he entered the room. He ventured now to turn from Kitty, to turn as if for corroboration to the tall girl with the sweep of heavy dark hair.

"Singles are tiring," she said in a deep voice.

He carried a cup of tea across the room to Mrs. Madden. What strange cups — black! Now he came to think of it, the room was strange; the grey walls were the colour of mist and the furniture was black and gold — a very odd sort of drawing-room. He preferred something warmer and more like what other people had.

Mrs. Madden detained him for a little, talking of his journey, of Sidney —

"Darling harbour!" said Harry.

She inquired after the Richard Kings, after Ethel's people. Was the old Archdeacon still alive? And Harry himself, what had brought him to New Zealand?

"I'm an engineer, but I prefer pioneer work to any other." He told her of the crane at Port Sudan, and always, as she listened, he was conscious of her thoughtful gaze.

"Mr. Madden will know what is being done here. Are you in a hurry to start work?"

" Oh, no."

"Christchurch is a pleasant, hospitable sort of place —"

"It seems so. Mr. Madden has already put me up for the club."

"I hope you will come up and see me as often as you can. I am always here." She indicated the sofa, angling

for the young man's pity. She had seen him look at Kitty, turn from Kitty to Margaret. It was a chance.

"I suppose you are going to play tennis now? Well,

I won't keep you, but you must stay to dinner."

From her sofa she could see the court. She looked down the long black-and-gold room with its walls of mist, looked out of wide French windows that opened on a tiled veranda. Opposite was the Holdens' house, and the tennis-court lay between. Many a bitter afternoon had Mrs. Madden spent watching Margaret play singles with her husband — with Philip!

If the stranger from overseas should take a fancy to Margaret —

He played well with a hard serve, a serve it was difficult to return, and he was amazingly quick on his feet.

Margaret could not but be impressed.

Mrs. Madden would give him opportunities. He looked an unusual sort of young man. He wasn't handsome, she doubted his being particularly clever, but he had fine shoulders, shoulders disproportionate to his height. A woman would admire those shoulders! Rosa Madden saw them as an indication of strength; and that evening at supper she turned the talk on narrow escapes, tight corners, sudden death.

"It is curious how careless people are," said Harry. "I remember an instance when I was at the mines in South Africa. It was against the rules for any one to sit on the trolly-lines, yet men did it. One day the loaded trolley had just been dragged up the incline, and a big Cornishman, named Tredegar, sat himself down just there, and began to fill his pipe. The chain of the trolly must have been flawed; anyway, it broke and the released trolly came roaring back."

"And the man sitting there?" breathed Kitty.

"They took what was left of him up in a sack."

"Oh!" screamed Kitty, putting her hands over her ears. "How terrible!"

"It was a quick death," said Margaret slowly, and she thought that though such a death sounded terrible, it was not. One moment and you were fighting your losing battle, the battle that was so exhausting; the next, and the gnawing pain in your heart was gone, extinguished. Her eyes dwelt on Harry with an unseeing gaze. What was it like to be utterly, everlastingly at peace? She had a sensation as of wings bearing her up — not her own wings. She turned her eyes from Harry to Philip Madden. No, not even for the peace of God —

"It is queer," murmured Mrs. Madden, "that after seeing a thing like that men should still believe in a special Providence, should still think there is a God who can interpose between them and accident."

Harry looked at her in surprise; he did not see the connexion. "Yes," he said, "I do. Why not?"

"Simply because He doesn't."

"You mean He doesn't always," said Harry.

"You believe in a God who has favourites?"

"I think He has His chosen."

"Oh, you are like my brother! The poor boy was killed during the Boer War. In his last letter he said, 'My escapes have been hair's-breadth. I cannot think but that they are due to One Above who has taken me specially under His protection. No doubt I am being preserved for some purpose—' The man who shared his tent was playing with a revolver, did not know it was loaded, and as my brother wrote those words it went off. Across them is a brown smear—" She sighed, for she was the only sister of five brothers and the five were dead. How could she expect more happiness, a better fate than

had been theirs? "Ah, Mr. King, we none of us like to believe that we are subject to immutable law."

"I don't believe it," said Harry. "I've evidence to the contrary."

"Evidence? Oh, come now!"

"Anyway, whether or not it is what you would call evidence, it is good enough for me."

He had volunteered for every foolhardy expedition, gone on every forlorn hope during the Boer War. But she would say that his escapes had been due to chance! There was also his remarkable cure — he could hardly speak to her of that. Yet surely that was convincing? Later, when he was in the billiard-room with his host, he mentioned it.

"Why, good heavens, man," said Madden, "such cures are as plentiful as flowers in spring! Look at White, the man I introduced you to at the club; he's an instance in point. He's as sound as a roach now and the father of half a dozen kids, and he's only one of many. If that gammey heart of yours had got right, though, you would have had something to make a song about."

This, though disconcerting, did not alter Harry's conviction. How could it when he had walked with God?

II

When he left the Maddens' house it was as an escort to the girls. He was sorry Margaret Holden had such a little way to go; she had appeared willing to listen when he talked and he wanted to go on talking. If he had had any encouragement he would have lingered, pouring out words, have kept Margaret at her gate and Kitty waiting.

But Margaret, smiling at him faintly, held out her hand. "I seem to have been born tired," she said, "and

tonight I'm worse than usual. There's nothing for it but bed. Good night, Mr. King."

"I shall see you again?"

"You want to tell me more about preferential tariffs for the Empire?"

"I want to make you see what the Empire means."

"Do you? Well, good night now. Good night, Kitty."

She went slowly up the drive.

Harry walked on with the little nurse. "Who are the Holdens?" he said.

"Holden made a fortune in Canterbury lamb. He is a widower and Margaret is his only child. Very pretty, isn't she?"

"Pretty? Hardly." Pretty wasn't the right word.

"Not your style? Dear me, and I thought she was."
Not far to Kitty's lodgings. "Won't you come in
and have a drink? I do as I like here; and there's always
whisky and soda going for my friends."

"Afraid I must get back."

"Well — another time. You know, I was awfully interested in what you said — about the Empire and that. I've never met any one before who could explain it to me; I dare say I'm stupid —"

"We'll have lots of talks." He shook her hand so

heartily that she cried out with the pain.

"Oh," she said, "but I do like a man to be strong."

III

Harry at the club was writing letters home; but the ink used for "Dear mother" was long since dry and he had added nothing further. His thoughts, indeed, were with Margaret Holden, with the black swathe of hair

folded smoothly across Margaret's brow, with the dark eyes that so often rested on him without seeing him.

To him entered Madden with an offer of work. "A well-paid job!"

"Constructive?"

"They are making a tunnel over at Orea, and up to now have been using hand-labour — rock-drills, you know. But they are not making much headway. They want a man to take down machinery and set it up."

"I could do that. When should I be wanted?"

"As soon as you could go."

"I like this place," said Harry; "I don't know that I'm in any hurry."

Madden moved as if he found the deep leathern chair of the club uncomfortable. "Like more than the place, perhaps?" he said, and did his best to smile.

Harry laid down his pen. "That is so," he said at last. "Do you think — do you think I've a chance?"

"A chance with Holden, do you mean?"

"Well, I didn't - but -"

"Depends on what you have to offer." If only he could have knocked the silly smile off Harry's face!

"To offer?" The other was taken aback. "I've got my hands and my head. I can earn enough to support a wife. What more does he want?"

"It wouldn't be much use going to Old Joe unless you could show him you had an established position."

Harry had not intended to go to Old Joe. "I was drawing £800 a year in Egypt."

"You were - yes." Why the devil hadn't the fellow

stopped in Egypt?

"I hope," said the unsuspecting Harry, "that I shall soon be in an equally good position here."

"Oh - will be." He forced a grin. Harry was a free

man; he could go ahead with his work — ay, and with his wooing. Madden lifted his hand from the arm of the chair and let it fall again; it felt weighed down, loaded with invisible shackles, loaded so heavily that it was useless.

"You mean that I've got to show them?" The idea of a task, of something tangible, pleased him. When it came to deeds he was the man. "Very well, then, it's me for Orea, and I'll work like a navvy." He turned an awakened face on the man lying back wearily in the deep chair. "Isn't she a topper, Madden? You think — you think I've got a chance?"

"Has she ever led you to suppose --"

The prospect of a job, the hope of returning to the strains of "See, the Conquering Hero Comes," was working in him like yeast—that evening he wrote in the shiny black notebook that Madden was the whitest man he had ever known!

"Ah!" said he jovially, "wouldn't you like to know?"
He got up from the writing-table. "Let's go and have a
drink?"

Madden excused himself. A little more of Harry's society and the feelings he was controlling with so much difficulty must break loose.

"Business? It's always business with you, old man."
He slapped Madden on the shoulder; and Madden set his teeth and bore it. "Well — you shall dance at our wedding —"

IV

Harry when he reached the camp at Orea found himself the representative of a new order. Machinery was to take the place of hand labour and Harry was to erect it. For some time after his arrival the entries in the shiny black notebook were entirely concerned with his work.

"Went up Fellbrigg Creek to see where the pipe-line is coming for the power. 790 feet."

"Working at crane - fine."

"Rails and timber-loading - fine."

"Got up high-pressure side compressor and bed-plate. Three horses up incline."

"Fixed compressors on their beds with bolts and dowel-pins."

"Drills started on the tunnel-face: satisfactory."

The foreman of the hand-labour contingent, Dan Dillon, was notorious for having bossed every camp in which he had worked. Tales of his brutality hung, like a warning, in the atmosphere, and where he was concerned men walked delicately. This man perceived that the machinery which Harry had brought would supersede him. He brooded over the state of affairs, and the anger in him, the anger that was always smouldering, began to flame. It was not directed against the masters, however, nor against the iron and steel, but against the men, traitors to their class, who were helping Harry to bring power down the mountain-side and substitute machinery for hand labour; in particular it was directed against Archie McClean, a mechanic who had come to Orea Camp with the new boss.

One Sunday in August, a bitterly cold day of rain and wind which towards afternoon had ended in a snowfall, Harry was in his shack on the hill-side. He had been engaged fixing up a fireplace, and was surveying it with the approval of a man who knows how great have been the difficulties he has had to surmount, when the sound of a commotion in the camp reached his ears.

He went to the door. The snow had ceased, but a wind, a piercingly cold wind, was blowing. Harry did not like

the cold, was not enjoying a winter in the mountains wished, indeed, he were back in Egypt. The wind reminded him of holes in the hut-walls, of interstices between the roughly squared tops. He meant to plug them as soon as he could spare the time. After all, no time like the present! As for the camp, the men weren't babies -

He was turning back into the room when he caught sight of a figure, dark against the snow. It was that of a man, and the man was running towards him up the track. In another minute a small foxy fellow, West by

name, came across the little clearing.

"It's Dillon and McClean," he panted. Harry reached for his revolver. "Can't you fellows stop them?"

"The men are afraid of Dillon."

"Pah! Afraid?"

"He's looking pretty ugly."

"All right!" With West at his heels, he ran down the hill-side. In the camp the men were clustered about a small open space, and what was going on there Harry, being short, could not see. He thrust in among them, using his strength.

Dillon and McClean? As far as make-up was concerned, he did not think them unequally matched. The foreman was a square chunk of muscle, but the Scot was taller, had the longer reach. Remained the spiritual factor, the fierce will behind the muscle.

Harry forced his way to the front, and as his glance fell on the men he saw at once that their fighting was elemental and without science. Neither knew how to box and their scrapping consisted of fierce attempts to damage each They had, indeed, as much idea of clean fighting as a mongrel dog. When Harry reached the edge of the crowd they were rolling over on the ground. McClean

had just frustrated an attempt on the part of Dillon to gouge out his eyes and Dillon was seeking a fresh hold.

"He'll do him a mischief," cried O'Farrell, a lean cornstalker from Sydney; and before Harry, quick as he was, could interfere the mischief was done.

"Gaw blimy - he's bitten him!"

Harry, calling for volunteers to part the men, flung himself on the struggling heap.

For the next few minutes he was far too busy with the leg he had tackled to grasp the enormity of what Dillon had done. The cornstalker, little West and another, were working with him; but it was all they could do, each grappling with a limb, to drag Dillon off McClean. The man put out his utmost strength, once and again he almost broke from their hold; and in the end, before they had him quiet, there were two men hanging to each limb. Even then the madman glowered at them, furious and unappeased.

"I'll do him in yet," he shouted as they carried him

into a shack. "It's him or me bites the dust."

He was covered with blood and soil; and blood, not his own, was on his lips. "Fetch water," said Harry.

They brought it in a kerosene tin.

Inadvertently the men had relaxed their grasp of Dillon. As the kerosene tin was brought in he sprang up and, with one mighty kick, sent it through the roof of the shack. They had their work to do over again. The icy water had been scattered over them; it ran down the walls, sank through their rough clothes. They slipped on the wet floor as they wrestled with Dillon, but at last they had him helpless and apparently resigned.

"Never seen him in such a bait," said West, as Harry, after locking the shack on Dillon, turned away. "He's got the devil's own temper. He meant killing McClean."

"He must learn he can't do as he likes here," said Harry, whose mind was divided between pity for the man who, superseded, had blundered in his wrath, and horror at the form that blundering had taken.

At the moment horror was uppermost, for Dillon had bitten a lump of flesh out of McClean's shoulder.

When Harry reached the injured man's shack he found that others versed in the rough surgery of the wilds, were already bandaging his hurt. McClean had been bleeding freely and the place was a reeking shambles. As Harry's shadow fell on the threshold McClean started up as if to rush away. Seeing it was only the boss, he fell back on his seat. "I think I'll draw my pay," he muttered. "This is more than I bargained for. I'll chuck the job."

Harry was, however, disinclined to lose a useful mechanic. "No," said he, "it's Dillon goes."

But Dillon's ferocity had scared the man; he was frightened, as of a mad dog. "It was him or me. I suppose you've got him safe? He—he can't get out?"

"I fancy he's had about enough of it," said Harry reassuringly. "Anyway, he's under lock and key."

He went back to his hut and resumed work on the logwalls. Dillon must go — of course he must. A foul of the worst kind, and, anyway, his action had only precipitated matters. He and his kind were no longer needed at Orea. The pity of it that such strength should be no longer of any use, that cold, dull iron should have taken its place! The strength Dillon had shown! Harry's arms ached. He could not remember to have seen anything like it before.

He was stuffing up an interstice through which the wind had whistled suggestively since first the logs were laid on one another, when echoes of another disturbance reached his ears. This time he did not wait to be fetched but, revolver in hand, tore down the track. If Dillon should have broken loose —

He thought, with sudden clearness, of the kerosene tin. The shacks were crazy buildings. If Dillon had set his mind on getting out he would do it. Why hadn't he, Harry, bound him, staked him out?

And McClean was hurt, was afraid. He wouldn't put up much of a fight — the poor beggar couldn't.

Harry was heading for Dillon's shack when he saw that the door was off its hinges. Fool — he might have known!

West shouted to him as he ran past, "Dillon's with McClean!" and Harry saw that a crowd had gathered about the hut.

The door was shut.

He swore. The white-livered skunks, why didn't they burst it in? They were afraid of Dillon. Good Lord — afraid!

No time to lose! From within the shack rose bestial shouts, the crash of tinware, of iron, a sudden scream.

With a kick he stove in the door. Dillon had got his victim down; he was throttling the life out of him. "It's him or me bites the dust," he had said.

It was difficult for Harry, in the medley of overturned furniture and torn woodwork, to get at the struggling men. Slipping his revolver into his pocket, he aimed a blow at Dillon's face, and, as luck would have it, caught him, good and hard, on the temple. He rolled over stunned, and Harry pulled McClean from under him. When, a few minutes later, Dillon came to himself he was covered by a revolver.

"Don't you make any mistake: you move and I'll shoot you."

Dillon looked from Harry to McClean, gurgling and sobbing on the floor in slow recovery. He was still dazed.

"How was it?" he said stupidly.

"I hit you."

" You? "

He stared at the boss, met the impact of a will fiercer even than his, and, perforce, accepted the situation. He was beaten, the boss had beaten him.

"Why did you come barging in? It wasn't your show."

"If you'd done for McClean you'd have been stretched."

"What's the odds?"

Sullen, broken, unresisting, he was led away. Harry gave orders that he was to be staked out in his shack—a thong round each wrist and ankle to fasten them apart. He would be safe then till morning, and when the first working day of the week should break over the snowy landscape he was to be drummed out of the camp.

The feelings of the men who gathered on the following morning to witness the passing of Dillon, were mixed. They had suffered at his hands, more than one had been savagely ill-treated, yet they were vaguely sorry for him. He had been mighty in his little way and he was fallen. The story would run before him. Wherever he found work, if he tried the old bullying, blustering tactics, it would be, "'Ere, don't you come it over us! We know all about you. Ever 'eard of Orea?"

For Dillon it was domino.

V

Difficulties with springs in the rock face, difficulties with the concrete, with the foundation; and as long as Harry had difficulties with which to contend he was happy.

The company increased his salary and listened to his advice. They hoped he would stop among the snow-capped mountains until their tunnel was driven through into daylight. They could not ask for a harder-working, more resourceful manager, and they thanked Madden for recommending him.

"A really good man," said White, the chairman of directors, "is difficult to get. Now King doesn't drink, he works like a nigger, he puts his brains into the job, yet he's, how old — thirty-four, did you say? Such a man ought to be at the top of the tree. What's his vice?"

The men were sitting in the smoking-room at the club.

"As far as I can make out," said Madden, "he can't stick to a job. He's had good opportunities, but he's here today and gone tomorrow."

The fat face of the chairman showed anxiety. "I hope he'll stick to Orea."

"I hope he'll stick to it," said Madden heartily, "till he walks out the other side."

"He has just asked for a week's leave of absence."

"The deuce!"

"Of course, it was granted. Indeed, as we've surmounted the main difficulties, he could be spared."

"Then," said Madden, "you'll be lucky if you get him back." He swallowed his whisky and soda at a gulp and rose. Harry on his way back to Christchurch—

Madden's feet were noisy on the parquet-flooring as he went out, and White looked after him, surprised at his abruptness, at the hasty, almost angry way in which he moved. Madden was a fine-looking man, but as a friend unsatisfactory. Well, every one knew he didn't get on with his wife, and if a man had no comfort in his home—

White thought complacently of the right little, tight

little button-rose who was the mother of his six children. Poor old Madden!

VI

That evening, in the city clothes he had not worn for months, Harry King walked out to the Maddens', and every house he passed that was to let won from him a glance, a thoughtful, measuring glance as of one who says: "Is it large enough? Will the furniture I mean to buy look well in it? Will She think it the right sort of house or would She prefer something different — larger, smaller, more stately, cosier — what?"

As he entered the drawing-room it was as if Orea had never been. The present linked itself to the past without a break. Mrs. Madden, in a crimson gown which accentuated her pallor, was lying on the black-and-gold sofa. Kitty Gray, who had just returned from Wellington, had come up to gossip about her last case, and Margaret Holden's tall figure, in the white she habitually wore, was at the piano. She was playing from memory, and Madden was in a long chair at her side. He had insisted on lighting the piano-candles—

As Harry came through the hall he had heard the music, and had guessed the player to be Margaret. He was in luck. He had come to look for her, to say "Have I a chance?" and she was here, under this roof which sheltered only his friends.

"You back?" said Madden, and the surprise and pleasure of the others covered the banality of his welcome.

Mrs. Madden raised herself on the pillows. "We are all glad to see you," she said in her clear, slow voice. "It has been dull here while you have been away — stagnant. I expect you will wake us up." She looked about

her, at the faces of the girls, at her husband. "Sit down, Mr. King, and tell us what you have been doing."

Below his preoccupation with Margaret lay the fresh memory of the fight between Dillon and McClean; it was near enough to the surface for Harry to clothe it with words. He gave his impression of it — the savagery and the pity, the old order passing —

Even Rosa Madden saw the rough camp among the mountains, saw Harry crashing through the door of the shack, running in on the would-be murderer. "I wonder

you dared."

"Oh, that was all right. I was the boss; it was my job."

Kitty's eyes were round. "And you had to be so quick —

"Rather! McClean was black in the face."

"Oh!" She shrank from the crude detail.

"Strange," said Mr. Madden, "that Dillon should have been afraid of the revolver."

"I don't think he was. I think it was just a sort of last straw. He had made his bid and lost. He'd cocked it over the other men all his life and in machinery he'd found something stronger than himself. He was broken, done for."

"Something stronger than himself," repeated Madden, "and that breaks a man, yes."

VII

When the little gathering said good night Mrs. Madden laid a hand on Kitty's arm: "Just a minute."

"I'm afraid I must be going."

"Mr. King wants to speak to Margaret. Give them time to get ahead."

"Oh, I don't know." She figured an étui lying on the table at the head of Mrs. Madden's couch, fingered it so roughly that the clasp gave and the mother-of-pearl contents were scattered over the carpet. Mrs. Madden watched her collecting them. "And the gold thimble, Kitty? It must have rolled under the sofa."

Kitty had them all at last, every little gleaming implement. She shut them hurrically into the green-and-silver box and made her escape. In Mrs. Madden's eyes as she watched the slight figure pass rapidly across the lawn, was contemptuous understanding. "She, at least, has changed her note."

She lay back among pillows stiff with gold. They were no more easy to her than her life; but they were, she thought, beautiful. When the tinsel of them grew tarnished she would throw them away, buy others. She would have what she wanted —

What she wanted?

Harry, walking with Margaret Holden to her gate, was fiercely conscious that each step was the passing of opportunity. He must speak to her; his heart was bursting with what he had to say, it was throwing itself about in his chest so that he was nearly choked, and yet he could not find words. "You know," he said at last, "you know why I went to Orea?"

Margaret stirred in her dream. "It was a good opening, I suppose."

"I wanted you to realize," said Harry, "that I was a man who could do things."

She had hardly been aware of him. Outside the drama of her life a few dim figures moved, and Harry's had been one of them. She had seen him, vaguely, as a friend's

[&]quot;She doesn't care for him."

[&]quot;You think the caring is all on his side?"

friend; had not bestowed on him more than a moment's thought. That he should have been thinking of her was startling, it was also disquieting.

"I did not doubt it," she said coldly.

"You know I went because of you!"

They had reached her gate. She stepped inside and turned, a tall figure, black and white under the brilliant moon.

"I?" she said, as if he had accused her of something discreditable. "How was I to know?"

"I thought my going would speak for me."

"Dear Mr. King, I never dreamed it had anything to do with me."

She hoped that was conclusive, but Harry could not believe what had been so patent to others had been hidden from her.

"Why did you think I went to the Maddens'?"

"I didn't think."

"I went to meet you."

She moved impatiently. It irked her that a man's thoughts — even his thoughts — should have come about her, come near.

"And Madden knew. He encouraged me -"

"Mr. Madden?"

"He got me the job at Orea. He told me I hadn't a chance unless I proved to you I wasn't a waster."

"He sent you to Orea?" He detected a hint of laughter, of feminine exultation, and imagined she was at last beginning to realize what he had done.

"I worked there like a dock-labourer," he said earnestly. "I want to spend my life working for you."

A shadow like a grey moth flitted by; it hesitated preceptibly, but neither saw it and it flitted on down the road.

"Oh no," said Margaret in a troubled voice, "no."

"I'm rough compared to you. I left school early; I have not bothered much with books. But," he paused and his voice sank to soundlessness, "well, I'd do anything on earth for you —"

"Don't -" said Margaret.

"You've only to say."

"Mr. King, I'm sorry, more sorry than I can tell you, but it's no use."

He began to plead, urging on her the proof of devotion that he had given, begging her to think it over, to let him have a chance. Why shouldn't she? What more could he do or offer?

"Oh, stop —" she said, lifting a hand as if to stay the flow of words. "Mr. King, be sensible."

"Sensible?" said Harry.

"A woman knows whether any particular man attracts her; and if he doesn't, she says 'No'— at least, she does if she's honest."

"It might come."

"Come?" she said derisively, and touched the back of his hand with a finger-tip. "If I could care for you, that would have sent a quiver of fire up my arm; it doesn't."

How did she know? "There is some one else," he said.

She looked at him sadly. "It's growing late, Mr. King." The old unseeing look had come back to her eyes; do what he might he could not banish it. For her he hardly existed. "Good night."

Kitty's lodgings were in a corner house. As Harry came swinging by he caught sight of a little figure at the gate, and guessed that she was waiting for him. His heart turned to her in gratitude. She would know that Margaret had turned him down.

"It's early yet," he said. "Come out to supper with me."

The thought of his dark and silent room at the hotel was unendurable. He would get Kitty to sit with him as long as possible. Affection is comforting when you are down on your luck.

As they went through the streets she slipped her hand under his arm, and he, who was as finicky with regard to touch as a woman, responded gratefully. She stood between him and the realization that he had lost Margaret.

At the "Black Cat" they had a choice of tables, and decided on one at the end of the long room. Kitty had looked round a little anxiously. She sat opposite to Harry, and in a glass behind him kept watch on the door — no one here that she knew, no one as yet.

Ordering a light wine, he drank "to your bright eyes," and Kitty dimpled. From under her nurse's cap tendrils of glistening hair, breaking in little curls, made her look younger than she was. The sight of Harry, released from thraldom, gave her a little excited feeling. Here was the man that she would like to catch —

"I'm going to chuck my job with the Orea Tunnel Company. Don't know whether I'm wise or not and don't care. Sick of the whole business."

"What shall you do?"

"Go on a tour round the islands. Must be something in the country worth seeing."

He was going away, going in reckless mood; he might never return. Kitty's heart began to beat quickly. "Oh, Harry," she breathed, and in her anxiety leaned towards him across the table, "take me with you!"

The offer was to the poor fellow like moonrise on a

dark night; it could not turn the night into day but it might prevent him losing his way. He looked at her kindly. "I wish I could."

"I'd love to go. Oh, Harry, I would like it so much."

The meaning of her offer had hardly reached him. She wanted to be good to him, to comfort him in his trouble. He met her eyes, and there was that in Kitty's face, on her parted lips, that brought him a fuller knowledge. "But—" he said, for he was no betrayer of innocence.

She twisted her wine-glass about, making the yellow lights shift in the wine, watching them. "It — it wouldn't be the first time," she murmured.

He was still dubious. "I like a square deal."

"Yes — yes," she said, "it would be all right, really." She was at her ease again, only eager to carry her point.

"Well, then - perhaps."

"Oh, Harry," she clapped her little hands, "how jolly it will be!" And she smiled at him, happy as a child.

"How will you manage?"

"That's easy. I have an offer of a case at Orunga. I'll wire it off."

"People will know."

"Stupid!" She pouted at him. "I shall tell every one that I've gone to it."

Evident she could take care of herself. "I shall pull out on the ten o'clock train tomorrow," he said.

"I'll be there. We won't start together, we'll meet — down the line."

"Yes," he said, smiling over her simple ruses, feeling that it was dear and sweet of her to be willing to come with him, for though Margaret had turned him down, it was still Margaret!

No question of anything serious between him and Kitty;

but he liked a girl who was not always on the make, who wanted to give. What would Kitty get out of their fortnight together? As far as he could see — nothing.

VIII

In her eyrie at the corner house, an eyrie with lookouts along the crossing roads, Kitty sat before her dressing-table. She had said good night to Harry and come up to bed; but she was too excited to be sleepy. Moreover, she had a letter to write.

It was a warm evening, and, with her nightgown open at the throat, she sat at her dressing-table. The lace cover was cumbered with silver pots, pots she kept meticulously clean and which she thought showed what a refined and artistic person she was. That night, however, the pots had been pushed aside to make room for her writing-case. It was a fat writing-case, it bulged with letters, and it went with Kitty on all her journeyings. She opened it and searched among its contents for one particular letter.

Before she went off for her fortnight with Harry she meant to make sure of the future. That fortnight would imperil what she valued most in the world, but she was going to insure herself against disaster. Harry was not to be trusted: he would accept what you offered, he would not give anything in return.

But he was adorable.

That fierceness and the strength of him! A shiver of anticipatory delight ran through her limbs. She was conscious of a sweet hot stir — whatever it cost she must go.

She found the letter; it was from Ernest Franks, the accountant, and it asked her to marry him. Franks was

a fair, dapper man with very thin legs. She had refused him twice, had refused him on account of those thin legs. What else could he expect?

"DEAR ERNEST,— Just off to a case at Orunga, but I don't expect to be away more than a fortnight. Perhaps when I get back I may have something to tell you that you will like to hear.

"Your flighty but affectionate little "KITTY."

IX

The evening of the first day found the travellers in a fairyland of lakes and mountains. They had decided to stop when and where the humour took them. The sight of a white hostelry, reflected in still waters — waters which under the sunset sky flamed and shone — caught their fancy.

"What do you say to this?" asked Harry; and his companion, weary of the train, agreed.

A broad road ran from the station to the inn, and beyond it the hills rose abruptly, fold on fold.

"I know the islands pretty well but I've never been here," said Kitty.

They inquired for rooms and found that the place, which catered for summer visitors, was nearly empty. The season was over. "We close down for the winter," said the clerk simply, "but, of course, that is not yet." He opened the ledger. "What name shall I enter?"

"King - Mr. Henry King."

"And wife?"

"No." Harry had spoken without thinking, and for a moment he held his breath. What would Kitty do?

The clerk glanced questioningly at her. "Sister," she said quickly, "Miss King!"

But when they were alone she flew at Harry. "How could you! I felt my cheeks flame — such a position to put me in! Any one can see we are not brother and sister."

"Couldn't tell a lie about a thing like that," said Harry. He was confident that here also he spoke the truth.

Kitty looked at him forlornly. A man who could not lie for one, commit all the sins of the decalogue for one! Together only a few hours and already he had left her to face the music! A good thing, perhaps, that she had written that letter to Ernest Franks. He might have thin legs but you could depend on him.

She went to her room to wash off the stains of travel. Perhaps there were two kinds of men, lovers and husbands, the one for holidays, the other for the serious business of life. She thought wistfully of Harry. In a room he took the eyes of women. In England, in Africa, wherever he had been, women must have felt for him as she did; and he—had he failed them as he had failed her that day? Would he fail every woman that he fancied he loved or who loved him? He would—she knew it; yet how desperately she wanted him, wanted him not merely for a fortnight. She loosened her soft glinty hair and ran out on to the landing.

"Harry!"

He came to his door.

"I only wanted to suggest you put on something you can row in. We might go on the lake after dinner."

In her blue Japanese wrap, the fleece of gold rippling to her waist, she was the sort of oleograph Harry could appreciate. She stood smiling up at him, and he caught her in his strong arms, pressed his hard lips to hers, and whispered in her ear.

The clerk, passing quietly through the hall, smiled to

himself. "Not much brother and sister about that," said he.

X

"Why do you want to go back?" said Kitty, conscious of restlessness on Harry's part, annoyed by it. "You are your own master."

"Want will be my master if I don't get a job."

"There are more jobs going in Australia than here. Why not try your luck there?"

"I might."

"Oh, do, Harry." She thought, "And I will go with him, and in the end he'll forget Margaret, and I shall be there, and perhaps — perhaps —"

"But just now," said Harry, "we're bound for Christ-

church."

"It's out of our way." Best to take it for granted she was going too. "The boat sails on Friday, and if we go straight down we shall catch it."

"My trunk is at Christchurch." He thought fondly of

his tools.

"They'd dispatch it to meet us at the dock. Let me --"

She rose, eager to take the steps that would ensure his going, but Harry shook his head.

"You don't get me."

The trouble was that she did, that she understood too well. For a fortnight she had done all she knew, yet at the end of it he was still thinking of Margaret. It was like trying to climb a slippery rock, you were up one moment and down the next. "Harry—" she said, and came across the room to him and perched herself on the arm of her chair. He was intermittently sensuous; liked to feel a hand on the thick waves of his hair, a slow

stroking hand. He would sit still for minutes at a time while the hand passed over his strongly springing crest, over the short warm hair on the back of his head, the crisp, close hair above his ears — would sit with his eyes shut, enjoying it.

As her hand moved she thought in quick dismay that this might be the last time she would touch those dark

locks. . . .

Not that Margaret would take him from her — no, but she had sensed in Harry an elusiveness with which she knew that she could not cope.

He would slip out of her life when she least expected it.

"Harry," she whispered, "we've been happy, haven't we?"

"Very."

"Let's go on being happy, dear."

" Yes."

"Let's go away together, just you and me; let's stick to each other."

He opened his eyes, looking out of the window as if in search of something.

"Will you, darling, will you?"

He sat up, moving his head away from her stroking hand. "Look here," he said, "it's our last day and we were going riding. That stable-help must have forgotten."

Kitty's face fell into puckers and her eyes filled. "You — you are unkind," she said.

"Now, now, don't try and come that over me."

A tear splashed on to his hand. "Oh, Harry — you must love me a little."

"Very much, my dear."

" Then -"

He had put her off the chair-arm, but she caught hold

of his hand, fondling it. "Don't, don't leave me, Harry, I can't bear it." Yet at the back of her mind she knew that he would.

"Look here," he said. "We've had a good time; let it go at that."

"You don't love me."

He had drawn his hand away and gone to the window. The stables were to the right of the hotel. He was listening for the sound of hoofs on the stones.

Kitty followed, but she did not venture to touch him. "Harry," she said humbly, "there was that man in Wellington, but I was young. I swear to you I didn't know. It's different now. I want — I do want to be a good girl. You have made me want to. If — if you would help me—"

The appeal found its way between the cracks, sank through to his heart. Kitty was weak; she clung to him, needed him. Without him she would go from fancy to fancy till she was down and out.

Turning from the window, he put an arm round her shoulders, and, for a joyful moment, she thought that she had won.

"Come," he said soothingly, "come, come."

She broke away and flung herself into a rocking-chair by the further window. Her little high-heeled shoes tapped on the polished boards.

Harry whistled, wishing the matter at an end. Silly to have taken the girl along; he would have been as happy without her.

He had not enjoyed the fortnight overmuch. Kitty was an engaging little pussy-cat, she scratched and purred lelightfully, but kittens were not much in his line. He could spare them an odd half-hour or so, but a fortnight, a whole fortnight! The last day or two had dragged,

He would be glad to get back. He wanted to see Margaret again. Pretty hopeless, but you never knew—
"Come on," he said. "Let's go and see about those horses."

The little foot stopped its irritating tattoo. Kitty sat very still for a moment, her face turned away, and Harry thought she was going to be sensible. Though he enjoyed scenes, he had had enough of this. He came nearer and bent over to look into her averted eyes.

The confident glance was too much for her. She sprang up. She caught at that defiant crest of curls and she tugged.

"Little cat!" said Harry with his chuckling, jolly laugh as he extricated himself. "Well, now you've evened up matters — so let's go out."

ARGARET HOLDEN could not sleep. A light burned dimly in the wide and airy room. It was protected from the breeze that came through the open window, and its steady pear-shaped flame cast a shimmer as of water on the ceiling. Margaret looked at it, hoping that to do so would make her forget the little pain in her side. Many times that night she had shifted her position, hoping to forget the little pain, to forget it in sleep; and always, after a minute or two, it had begun again, a faint pushing sensation, then a small definite ache, then —

Perhaps if she could leave off coughing?

Foolish of her to have sat about when she was hot, after playing tennis — when she knew, too, that she was liable to chills, that her chest wasn't strong.

She pushed the pillows into a hillock and leaned against

them; she might be more comfortable sitting up.

Her handkerchief showed a rusty stain; that was the cough. You could not cough all through a night and nothing happen. Her poor chest! The cough seemed to come from inside it, and it shook her and hurt her.

She was tired of lying in bed, tired of the long night and her own restlessness. If she were to get up? If she were to write one of those letters — the letters she never sent . . .

She wrapped herself in the white woollen gown that hung over the end of the bed, slipped her feet into white fur slippers that stood ready, and went to her desk.

Her side no longer hurt her; how could it when she was going to write to him?

From a secret drawer in the old table she took a special pen and a special pad of cream-laid paper. The penholder was of crystal, a white transparency, and the ink red. Almost every night Margaret wrote with it, and every morning she burnt what she had written.

"Beloved," she wrote, and sighed with the relief of utterance. Her heart had been overcharged with that word. She formed her letters with care, took delight in

shaping them. "Beloved!"

After that she wrote quickly.

"It is strange how emotion ebbs and flows. It is like the sea. When it ebbs you never dream the tide will turn, but the moment comes and the little waves of feeling begin to run back. You may have been glad to think the ebb has come and that there will be peace. You may have rejoiced in the stretches of recovered personality and the freedom. But you will do so only for a little time. Back it comes, memory, the vivid words, the stir of the blood, with finally the longing only one person can satisfy. The tide is full again, it hems you in; and its restlessness is the restlessness of your heart."

The pain had returned, pushing its way from unknown depths to the surface. Margaret got up and moved restlessly about the room. "What can I do? Oh — what can I do?"

As before, the change of position proved momentarily beneficial. She returned to the old bureau, to the pad lying white between the two candles, to the half-finished script — fine thin lines gleaming in the light, gleaming red. "I write from my heart," she said.

"The Buddhist doctrine of absorption into the divine used to leave me cold; but I see it differently now. To

be absorbed in what you love would not be extinction but life. It would be like lying in the sun on a hot spring day. You would be warmed through, you would hear the distant roar of the sea, the human sea, and you would have peace. You would be satisfied — oh, to be satisfied! — you would sleep, yet you would still be you.

"Oh yes, Nirvana for those who love.

"Beloved, if for one hour I might be absorbed in you!
"But if I had that hour I should want another and an-

other - all time."

A grey light was filtering through the wide meshes of the window-curtain and the wind had dropped. A fit of coughing tore Margaret's delicate chest and the pain came in stabs. She pushed the letter, with its fine scarlet writing, into a drawer, and staggered across the room to her bed. Another hour and the maid would come to her with a cup of tea. She had borne the pain all night, surely she could endure it that one hour more? She wondered, unhappily, if she could. She was so hot, so uncomfortable. She began to feel as if she were sinking, sinking through the mattress. A horrid feeling! It opened up possibilities of infinite descent. She saw herself sinking through her little bed, through the polished floor into — oh, not into the earth!

She could not lay there and face that possibility. Her hand groped for the bell —

II

"I think we must have a night-nurse as well," Dr. Wil-

loughby said.

Old Joe Holden sat in his big library, among the books that were to him as furniture. "Whatever you like, doc.; you've only to mention it."

"Well, then, I should like another opinion."

- "Who will you have West?" Holden was a big portly man, but his florid colouring had faded and he looked anxious.
- "I would suggest Cameron; I think he's the best chest man in the islands."
- "Get him as quick as you can. I suppose—" He could not ask the question; he was remembering that his wife had died of lung-trouble.

"I'm not satisfied, Mr. Holden, and that's the truth."

III

Margaret, in her small white bed, was more comfortable than she had been since the beginning of her illness. It was good to be adequately nursed, to have no bother about anything, to resign oneself.

She did not want the nourishment they brought in the

queer cup with a spout.

It was less trouble to take it than to refuse. She must be really ill. Two nurses meant that, and if she were, she need no longer try to keep Him out of her thoughts. A little indulgence! When she got better she would start the old treadmill effort that ended in nightly letters — letters that, poor things, had to be burnt.

While she lay ill she might drift a little — yes, surely. She lay between sleeping and waking, and around her was darkness, but against that darkness was his face. She

slept seeing it, woke to the vision of it.

Curious how near he seemed. It was as if his thoughts were holding her embraced, as if she were resting on them, on his breast. His voice was in her ear, deepened, trembling, as she had heard it once, twice, as she might have heard it often.

The house was very still. The nurse, a stranger to Margaret, was sitting by the window. She was glad they had not sent for Kitty Gray; she preferred a stranger.

In the silence she heard the steps of a man on the tiles of the hall: his step, but it did not ring, it — it dragged. Was it possible that he also was ill? She opened her eyes, and the nurse came to her with something in the familiar cup.

"Nurse," she said in her new voice, a voice that was hoarse and difficult, "some one came."

"Is it some one you would like to see?"

"Could I?"

If they would allow her to see people she could not be very ill.

"For a moment."

"Do I - " she smiled faintly, "do I look all right?"

It was fortunate, the nurse thought, that she could not see herself. "Oh, quite all right," she said, and walked crisply away, her starched skirts rustling, her shoes making a dry sound on the boards. She had seen Mr. Madden come up to the house and she knew that he had gone into the library. When she knocked on the door he came in answer. She was thankful he, and not Mr. Holden, had come, for she was afraid of Old Joe; he was so grim and so unhappy.

"Miss Holden would like to see you."

His face changed. "Does it mean she is better?"

"Oh, I'm afraid —" She was sorry. "The doctors said — any wish that she might express — that it didn't matter."

He turned back to tell Old Joe that Margaret had asked for him, then followed the nurse. She had expected that he would ask her questions, but he followed silently.

Margaret's poor altered face was turned towards the

door, and Philip Madden saw it with a sudden sinking of the heart. He knew and yet —

Though he knew, he had not realized how ill she was.

The nurse went back to her seat by the window. Outside was life, and behind her, in the darkened airy room, only things of which she did not wish to think.

"Margaret!" said the man, but the hunger in his voice was more than Margaret, enfeebled and with the feeling that she was adrift between sleep and waking, that at any moment she might slip into unconsciousness, could bear.

"Don't," she said.

He wanted to anchor the little drifting vessel, wanted her, she felt, to make some sort of effort.

"I can't," she said hoarsely. "You — you must let me go." She was weak, she could not make the effort.

"No, no," he whispered. "Darling — nothing shall come between us after this. Get better, and I'll give up everything and we'll go away. I — I want you so."

The old cry, that he wanted her. For two years he had sought to impose his will on hers.

He must not talk of the future; it meant worry and trouble. She did not want to think, she wanted nothing so much as peace. When he looked at her like that there was no peace.

"Soon better," she assured him. "Don't — don't be anxious." She moved her hand a little. She felt vaguely that he needed comfort, though she did not understand why he should.

"Oh, my dear," he said brokenly as he laid his lips on it, laid it against his cheek.

She felt his trouble as a vibration, as something that disturbed the stillness. She wished to drift away into a long dream, a dream of the good days before they knew

they loved; and his eyes, insistent, even fierce, were holding her back. "Tomorrow," she said.

The nurse stirred in her seat by the window, and Madden rose.

He went out with his head, iron-grey and square, carried high. Margaret's dim eyes watched him, her dulling ears listened to the sound of those retreating steps. It was as if she had been working a sampler, as if it were finished now, to the last stitch. She might fold up the canvas, lay it aside —

TV

The colours in which Mrs. Madden clothed herself expressed the mood of the moment. When she first heard that Margaret was ill she had put on a wine-coloured gown with ornaments of barbaric gold, heavy bosses which as she moved swung together with a metallic sound.

Margaret, who had been young and strong, who had been able to go about, to play tennis, to ride with Phillip, Margaret was ill.

Her turn to be helpless and inadequate, to see others

doing and going.

That day Mrs. Madden could not rest on her sofa; she got up at intervals, she made little attempts at a return to everyday occupations. Margaret's illness was a stimulus.

She sent often to inquire, but the inquiries were never "kind."

Margaret stood between her and hope; if — if there were no Margaret —

Mrs. Madden knew something about septic pneumonia; one of her brothers had died of it. Her thought went

again and again to that sharp illness, so short, only three days. His life blown out — like a candle.

She remembered her mother's face, its white bewilderment. Even though her mother had been dead these ten years, she felt a little ache of pity for her; she had been so stricken.

She pitied her mother, she pitied Mr. Holden; but for Philip, for Margaret, she had no pity.

Margaret should not have come between her and Philip.

There is love and love: the one is but amorous adventure, it is of the flesh, it comes and goes; the other—Rosa Madden loved her husband—

He might have come back to her, given her love for love, if it had not been for Margaret.

If it had been Kitty Gray it would have been amorous adventure, nothing more.

But with Margaret it was different.

For months now — perhaps even years, she could not remember, but, at any rate, for a long, long time — her heart had been wrung with fear. If he cared for Margaret in that way —

How she hated Margaret!

And now Margaret was ill. Rosa Madden clashed her heavy bosses of gold and moved about the room. She, the invalid, the dispossessed, she was comparatively well.

Philip did not come near her. She saw him go across to the Holdens' house, guessed that he was sitting with Holden.

The specialist had been. So they had had Cameron, not West? Well, West was past his work.

Mrs. Madden sent over to know the result. The Holdens were their most intimate friends. Natural that she should want to know.

Mr. Cameron had recommended this, recommended that

"the resources of science!"

A day and a night; and Mrs. Madden heard the drag of Philip's step as he came in for a bath. He had shared Holden's vigil, and now Holden was with his child.

Philip was tired, and though his grief and tiredness were for another woman, Rosa found herself thinking of him. Poor Philip, he could not help himself.

She took from her hanging cupboard a quiet-coloured gown. Her mood had changed, was changing. That day she did not move about, but lay on the black-and-gold sofa and kept watch. At first she watched the house opposite.

Philip was avoiding her. Since the beginning of Margaret's illness she, Rosa, had not seen him to speak to. She had, of course, seen him. When old Holden was upstairs Philip would come out of the house, and he would walk up and down. Every time he turned Rosa saw his face. She lay there, and after a time she did not see the house, she saw only his face.

She could not endure that he should be so unhappy.

Her hope — that last hope — the hope she had been cherishing! Well — what did it matter? Some days were cloudy, had no sun, and her life was such a day.

Because she loved him she must let him go. She did not want to but she must — she must.

The boundary between their garden and the Holdens' was a row of low shrubs. It was easy for Rosa Madden to pass from the one lawn to the other.

Holden was with Margaret, and Philip was pacing to and fro below her window. He walked along the side of the house. At the corner he turned and went up again. He walked mechanically because his thoughts were with Margaret, and also because he had not slept for many hours. As he reached the corner he saw the tall, angular figure of Rosa coming towards him across the sward. What did she want?

"Philip," she said harshly, and behind the high cheekbones her eyes glittered with a queer fierce light, "would it help if — if I set you free?"

An indescribably bitter look came into Madden's face. "Now?" he said, and threw back his head and laughed. "If you had done it two years ago — but, now?"

He turned his back, striding away, striding like a man possessed. He felt as if he were suffocating, suffocating with rage. The sense of what he was losing, of what — if this feeble, inefficient life had not blocked the way — he might have had, had overwhelmed him. He wanted to take Rosa by the throat, to shake her, shake the breath out of her. That she should still be cumbering the earth!

And in the room above, Margaret, lulled by the sound of that continuous pacing, half-opened her eyes. "Philip's voice!" she murmured.

V

Rosa's back hurt her. In crossing the gardens she had attempted more than with comfort she could perform. She found the return journey a matter of time and patience; but at last she was leaning against the drawing-room window, the long open window.

"I am afraid you are ill," said a voice from within. "Allow me!" and suddenly she was lifted, she was being carried, she lay once more on the black-and-gold sofa.

"Oh — it is Mr. King!" she said feebly. A tall woman, she had been wafted across the room as if she had been a baby in arms. "I thought you were at Orea."

"Just back," he said vaguely. "I dropped into the

club, and when I heard the news, of course, I came out." He looked at her inquiringly; he was hoping against hope that she would have good tidings for him.

"Margaret is a delicate girl, Mr. King, no stamina."

"You can't mean - "

She did not answer, and he got up and moved about the room. At all times a restless fellow, it seemed now as if he could not be still, and after a time the housewife in her took alarm for her delicate old cane chairs with the inlet mother-o'-pearl. She need not have feared. Harry's movements were as sure, as light, as those of a dancer.

"May I stay for a little?" he said.

"Stay as long as you like."

He came over to the sofa. "You too, you were fond of her."

"Oh, very," said Rosa Madden.

"She was always here."

" Yes."

"Of course, she was very much younger than you."

The lines by Mrs. Madden's mouth deepened. "Young enough to be my daughter."

"And so bonnie." He twisted round in his chair.

"You were so kind to her, you and Mr. Madden."

"She was fond of - of us."

He got up, found another chair, brought it forward. "I can't understand it. I've only been away a fortnight, and when I went she was quite well."

" Quite well."

" And now - "

"It is septic pneumonia, Mr. King."

He got up. "I'll just go over and inquire; there may —" he looked at her questioningly, "there might be a crisis."

"Oh yes, go," she said.

The news was the same. Margaret was slowly sinking and nothing — no device of science — could stay her. Mr. Cameron had been again, he had sat for some time with Old Joe in the desolate library, and now he was gone. The sun was rising over other lands but it was setting here.

"It is getting late," said Harry.

"You need not bother about that, Mr. King; I shall not go to bed."

He looked at her gracefully. "No, of course you wouldn't."

What a difference it made when you were in trouble, to be with some one who was in like case.

"But," said Rosa Madden suddenly, "you don't love Margaret!"

He stared in blank amazement. "I've never loved a woman as I love her," he answered.

"Then you have loved?"

Le hesitated. "I don't know."

"Perhaps women have loved you?"

He looked at her but did not answer.

"Have they?"

"Perhaps."

"And you - what do you want?"

" A friend."

"Most men want a sweetheart."

"I don't." Harry twisted himself about so that his feet were hanging over the arm of his chair. Mrs. Madden thought whimsically that presently they would be hanging over the back. How queer he would look!—but no, not much queerer than he did now. To her he seemed a boy, foolish, rather a dear. She would make him talk; it would help to pass the time.

" Well? "

"It's this way. Men aren't your friends, they are your rivals; you are out to get the better of them if you can. And women? Well, women want you to make love to them. But I'm lonely, I want a friend. I thought that Margaret—"

"Margaret," said Rosa bitterly, "has all the friendship that she needs."

"Ah!" he said simply, "I was afraid there was some one else."

"And it doesn't matter."

"Perhaps not."

She stared past him into the darkness of the garden. "To think it should have come to that!"

They sat for a time in silence, but Harry could not be quiet, could not be still. He moved away, he came back. At last he began to talk to her of old times, old memories, the railway town.

"You wanted to be a pugilist," she said. "Well—why not?"

He looked surprised.

"My father was against it."

"Why did he object?"

"He was afraid of my becoming brutalized."

"It was for you to decide."

"I thought there was something in it."

"A man has to take risks."

"If I could have felt that fighting was right I'd have gone on with it, but I couldn't — quite."

"Having given it all up, you are at peace with your

conscience, you are quite happy, quite satisfied?"

"I'm afraid," said Harry, "that is not so. I have been all over the world looking for something that I liked as much; I can't find it."

"You never will."

"Oh, come!"

"Are you very keen to go on living?"

"Not very. You see, there's nothing worth while."

" No."

The moon was rising. The pallid beams, passing through the farther window, fell on the strange companions — on the outline of Mrs. Madden's head, on Harry's face. "No," she said, "nothing else will be quite worth while. You were afraid, you did not dare, you gave up the big thing." She pushed the stiff cushions farther under, pulling herself higher on the couch. "This is how I see life. Most of us are born to do some one thing, to love some one person. We can't pick and choose. It's take it or leave it; you'll get nothing more. You had your bent — fighting; the Lord God gave it you, He made it the fulfilment of your nature, and — you let yourself be turned from it. Ah — poor boy!"

He was silent for a time, cogitating. "Yes," he said

at last, "I think you've hit it."

"Only one thing we want to do, one person we can love; not much, but all we get." She put her hand over her eyes. One person she could love, the one who had turned away. Why? Her health, because she had not borne him children? Why—because! The answer was no answer. Why had he left her? He could not have said. It had happened so. He had not meant to, had not wanted to, but he had seen Margaret, the person that he, in his turn, could love; and he had not been able to help himself.

The night wore on, and sometimes the strange companions talked, but more often they listened — listened to dull and far-off sounds, the faint suspicious noises of the dark, listened to their own hearts.

Mrs. Madden drowsed, and even Harry ceased his rest-

less movements. A lassitude that was the beginning of peace had fallen on them. Once and again Harry crossed the gardens to ask for news.

In the chill hour before the dawn a little wind broke like a ripple over the earth. A bird rose, calling to those who lingered, and Harry got up from his chair.

"It is the day," he said as he went out, and Mrs. Madden knew that this time he would not come back — knew that Margaret slept.

VI

She lay very quietly on her sofa watching the darkness thin into day. At dawn Philip came out of the Holdens' house, walking slowly. He had grown old during the long hours of the night. Rosa listened to the dragging steps. Would he come to her? Her heart was brimming. Oh, if he would but come!

The steps went by the door of the drawing-room and she half rose. If she dared call to him! They went on to his room. She heard him go in, and still she waited and listened.

The key turned in the lock, and Rosa Madden fell back on the sofa. She was outside his life; Margaret was still between them. He would not come back. N the smoking-room the men had settled down to cards. As Harry could play a bluffing game but not one that required thought, he had left the crowd and established himself on the red-cushioned seat that stretched from end to end, along the wooden wall. Sitting there, he could watch the long procession of the waves.

Coming round Cape Horn the ship had experienced a spell of calm cold weather. Whales had spouted, the sun had glittered on the pinnacles of an iceberg. But since then the weather had been foul. A succession of gales had buffeted the liner across the deep, and Harry had grown weary of the roughness and the cold. He had a cough, and felt the ship was ill-found, full of draughts. Forty-one days on board, 11,266 miles covered. A sailing-ship was one thing; but life on a liner was too full — for him — of chin-wagging.

Forgotten by the card-players, he stretched himself along the red velvet cushions and added a note to the many in the shiny black book. "Ap. 20. Gale and big sea. Hailstones. Lots of people nearly washed overboard, lee-side alleyway. Stable companion broke loose last night and confided. He was just out of an asylum. Cheerful!

"Usual growling and contentiousness. Can't do with it. Most deadly lot I have ever encountered. Hardly a saving individual.

"Depressed. The old feeling of negation.

"Wonder if father will meet me in London! He doesn't know when I shall arrive. Still, he was always good at ferreting out things."

Shutting the book, he restored it to his pocket and took out some letters. The ship was entering the channel.

As well, perhaps, to read them again.

On his return from the Maddens' house he had found them awaiting him, and after glancing through them hastily, had laid them aside.

One was from Kitty Gray. He had written to her from Rio, giving her his home address. A dear little sweetheart — Kitty!

The other — a thick black-edged letter — was from his sister Nancy. The black edge had filled him with apprehension.

His father? He trusted not. One reason for going home was that he wanted to see the old man again.

The first words of the letter had relieved that anxiety. Mr. King was hale, was still only dallying with the idea of retirement. The sign of mourning had been for a younger member of the family.

Bet had been married to Jack Tremaine for some years; they had prospered but had had no children. The deprivation being sore, they had consulted a doctor and he had advised an operation — only a slight operation, Nancy said.

Bet had gone into a nursing home to have it done, and, to the surprise, the horror, of the family, had died the following day, died from shock. Harry, himself mourning a loss, had wept for Bet. In her death she was nearer to him than she had been in life. The longing she had felt was one of which he too was dimly conscious. Children? Why, of course. He felt with Bet, that life without them was not good enough. The plucky old dear!

She would not hesitate, not she! She would make her arrangements, set the house in order for Jack, then take his arm and walk to the nursing-home. He could see them — Jack pretty down in the mouth, but Bet talking cheerfully. When the door was shut between them, when she was on the dark side of it, her face might change; but no, she had herself to bluff. She would be sanguine and hopeful till she stepped through that other doorway. And then?

Poor old Bet! Where was she now?

It was, after all, interesting to die; you found out things. Yes, but to die before the proper time, before you were three score and ten?

No catch in that.

A tear ran out of Harry's eye and down his nose—not the full round tear of youth, but one that was small and impoverished. Rotten luck that Bet should have lost her life! Hard, too, on old Jack. He was a stick-in-the-mud, Jack; he would not get over it in a hurry, he might never get over it.

Harry saw his brother-in-law, big and fair and slow, sitting by himself in diggings, and his heart swelled. He had known Jack for so many years, knew him so well, good points and bad. He was terribly sorry for old Jack.

The letter was long. Nancy did not like letter-writing, but for once she had squared her elbows to the task. A good deal had happened since she last wrote. Poor Bet, and then there was Mab. Mab had been and gone and done it; she was married. Did Harry remember Albert Swinton? Perhaps he would not, but Swinton had served his apprenticeship in the railway works. "I don't like him; he's the carneying sort, curries favour with father. There is no doubt he is out for what he can get. He lost

his job a fortnight after they were married and seems unable to get another, but I hear there are plenty going. Meanwhile they live with us."

Swinton? There had been a Swinton at the works. Harry had some difficulty in recalling him. A pasty-faced lad with pimples? He remembered the pimples, also that he had had stiff fair hair that stood up!

One of the crowd: what a man for Mab to have picked! A sponger too. Poor father! He wouldn't like to kick the fellow out, but Harry was on his way home; he'd see that Swinton got a job.

He turned back to the letter. Nancy, discontented with her lot — she taught in a secondary school — had decided to leave home. "Father does not approve, but I'm fed up with the place. I've had work offered me in Saskatchewan and I'm off."

Harry reflected. "If I'm thirty-four she must be let me see—thirty. Well, time she saw something of the world."

Bet dead, Mab married, Nancy in Canada! The girls had not done well. The old man had worked hard in order to procure them a good education, but something had been lacking. Harry wondered about it. Was it possible that college education made women too big for their opportunities? He had the feeling that his sisters, fine women as they were physically, were less feminine than, say, Ethel.

They had chances but did not grasp them, did not think them good enough, preferred to wait.

If a big thing had offered they would have taken it, but it was that or nothing.

Bet childless; Mab, at thirty, taking up with a ne-er-dowell; Nancy adrift!

They had turned out very differently from the boys,

No flies on Richard! Harry thought of his brother's spacious home by the Nile, of his entertaining Great Ones, entertaining them as equals. Oh, Richard was all right. James too: James was the responsible head of a department and married to Ella; James was in a better position than the old man.

Richard and James had proved entirely satisfactory, they had fulfilled their father's expectations. And he?

He chinked a few coins in his pocket. He had been absent from England ten years and during that time he had garnered sheaves of experience. Yes! Wherever he had been he had left his mark: he had erected quarantine plant, built barges, wharves, barracks, waterworks, cranes, tunnels, towers — what hadn't he done? In the old Saratoga trunk were photographs of his minute scratchings and buildings on the mighty round of the globe. He might not have made money; but to the best of his ability he had worked. Harry might have neither gold nor glory but he had done his bit, had been a pioneer. What more would you have?

The card-players pushed back their chairs and one, a red-faced jolly man, came up to him. "After dinner, what do you say to a game of poker, King?"

"I'm on," said Harry.

II

Heavy weather in the channel and a thick haze hiding the land! Harry, who, though as undemonstrative as the ordinary tom-cat, liked attention—a judicious amount of stroking—hoped that letters would be awaiting him at Plymouth.

His family, however, was not of the stroking kind. That their prodigal was longing for signs of affection and rejoicing did not occur to them. They had not written. Why should they? They would see him before long.

When the liner, at seven of an April morning, reached the Albert Docks Harry had looked eagerly for a home-face and looked in vain. The boat special took him to Liverpool Street, and from Paddington he caught a train which after a couple of hours' slow travelling, would land him in the railway town. He did not care. Securing a corner seat, he sat scanning the familiar country side, watching for landmarks that he remembered, that he had known all his life.

Of the seven elms which had stretched slantwise across the big meadow one was gone. Some winter storm! The asylum, however, looked as greyly desolate as ever; in the grounds deplorable little groups were still wandering. The river ran over the weir with the identical curl of snowy foam that he had so often seen; it dropped smoothly into the old brown depths. A few more houses along the route, more factories. His heart distinguished between the new and the old with an emotion that was almost painful.

When he stepped out of the train he glanced about him with a sudden hope; but no, nobody. He thought the station very dingy and he hated the advertisements. He also disliked the look of the ticket-collector, for he, alas! was young and knew not Harry. A different return this from the one he had planned! He gave directions about his luggage and walked away.

Ten years!

He had intended to make a fortune, grow famous, bring back with him a name which should ring familiar in the ears of home-keeping youth. Well, time enough; he would do it yet. He turned the corner into Parkside, and his glance fell on the grey palings. He had dreamed of returning with enough money to buy up squire's mortgaged

estate. The old red manor-house glowed cheerfully between the trees, and in Harry's pocket lay but a couple of sovereigns. He was as poor, poorer, than when he went away. No matter! His chance would come.

He had his record of work done. He had his hope for the future, his belief that God had interposed to preserve him both in sickness and in war, that God had chosen him, and that in His good time the way would be made clear.

Harry's mind was at rest. He could look with unconcern at the red house among the trees. Some day he would have the money to buy it.

Meanwhile he was very glad to be home. A shower had settled the dust and the sweetness of burgeoning life was in the air. England was a good place to come back to. "England, mighty mother!"

The gate of No. 14 Parkside stood open, and taking that as an omen of welcome, he ran up the rough granite steps. Another moment and he would be among his folks. He thundered on the door, excited, very happy—

"Who is it?" A middle-sized man, opening the door a few inches, stood in the aperture. Harry had an idea this might be Swinton, but he was not sure. The man looked as if he resented Harry's knock and Harry's appearance — meant, in fact, to keep him out.

"I'm Harry King and I'm coming in." He leaned for-

ward and the other hastily gave place.

" Mab!"

She came out of the dining-room, a napkin in her hand, her mouth still working.

"Why, it's Henry!"

"The same!" He gave her a cool brotherly kiss and looked into the room. A meal was on the table but only two places had been laid. "Where's mother?"

"Come in here first."

She knew the voice. "Come in, come in, Henry."

She was sitting up in bed, a shawl round her shoulders, and he saw with regret that her hair, her thick strong hair, was now iron-grey; otherwise the ten years had not changed her much. He kissed her, thinking she did not look ill.

"Seeing you, Henry, has done me good. I feel better. I shall dress and come down."

" Ay - do."

"Have you had your dinner?"

Same old mother, her first thought the material welfare of her brood! "I'll get some tucker while you are dressing."

In the dining-room Mab had laid a place for him. Her manner was uneasy. He felt that she was not glad to see him, that his return interfered in some way with her plans. Well, if she meant to quarter herself and her husband on the old people for the rest of their lives she had better look out. He, Harry, would not stand it. Share and share alike was his motto. While he ate his sister gave him the news. Nancy had gone to Canada; she had been offered a post as librarian. Oh, he knew? Did he know that Jack Tremaine was going back to Buenos Ayres? He could not stick England now that Bet—her glance went to the water-colours Bet had painted while still at school.

Mab was in black, Swinton too. Harry grew conscious

[&]quot;Where's mother?"

[&]quot;You can't see her, she's in bed. She's got a chill."

[&]quot;Can't see her?" said the amazed Harry.

[&]quot;She isn't well. It would be too much of a shock."

[&]quot;Rot!" He was already on the stairs, and a moment later husband and wife heard him rap on Mrs. King's door. "Are you there, mother? Can I come in?"

that he was wearing a blue shot-silk tie. He had a black one in his box; after dinner he would run up and change.

As he listened he glanced from his sister to her husband. Mab was thirty but she looked older, she wasn't wearing well. She had a peaked elfin face, mouth and chin the same shape; her eyes also were on the slant, and her russet dark hair came down into a point. She wasn't a bit pretty, but something about her face made him think of wings. He wondered if she cared for Swinton. Was if possible she could? The fellow had a long, thin nose and he talked in a drawly voice, and at the end of every sentence he sniffed.

"You see, don't you, King?" Sniff! "Bad thing, wasn't it, King?" Sniff!

Harry's habit was to eat in silence, to eat with enjoyment and give thanks to the cook — as he phrased it, "stomach-felt thanks."

When he had finished he got up. "I'm going round the house."

"Like me to come with you?" offered Swinton.

"I shouldn't."

He meant to start at the front door and renew acquaintance with every room upstairs and down. Swinton to go along? Swinton to keep an eye on him? The cheek of it!

What were they after? The old man's savings? They had better look out.

He started on his perambulations. In the hall, over cach doorway, was a pair of mounted horns. "New since my time," said Harry, and went towards the nearest. "Jove! — they are some I sent."

He was surprised and pleased. In the drawing-room it was the same; in fact, the aspect of every room in the house had been sensibly altered by contributions from him. He had no idea that he had sent home so many curios; they hung on walls, they stood on tables, they lay in cabinets. He patted himself on the back. They showed that he had not forgotten the old people, the old home, that out of sight, with him was not out of mind.

It was evident that his offerings had been acceptable, that they were prized. Assegais, skins, gold quartz, Kafir beads, greenstone — they had been set forth to the best advantage. He could imagine his mother's "Another box from Henry! Now where shall we —"

He could see his father pottering round, putting the horns here, the assegais there, trying the effect.

His offerings had enriched the house, but behind the weapons and savage trophies was the old furniture that he remembered, the familiar surfaces that had been polished by the elbow-grease of his folk. He was moved by the sight of it. The fine old pieces, the dear old things!

The horsehair sofa, on which tempter Chew had once spread his curtains of Nottingham lace, had lost a castor; Harry would replace it. The oak chest his mother had brought from her Lancashire home lacked a screw—"pretty plain that fellow Swinton did not do much about the house."

Mr. King's welcome was a little thoughtful. He had played the part of Abraham, of streaming locks and uplifted hand, and at the last moment his Isaac had been spared. Only Harry wasn't Isaac. It seemed — he brooded over the Jewish story — as if he had surrendered Isaac, bound him, laid him on the altar of sacrifice; and that the person risen from that funeral pyre had been Ishmael.

It was a disturbing idea.

"What do you think of doing — next?" The family had gathered in the dining-room for tea.

"Nancy said that there were plenty of jobs going."

"By this time, Henry, you ought to know what you can do best."

"I do, and though I'm all right as an engineer, I discovered in Africa that I have a positive genius for business."

His father moved impatiently. If Harry was what he claimed, why had he not made good? Anyway, as he hadn't why did he brag?

"What I should like," continued Harry, unconscious of criticism, "would be to strike a group of financiers who'd find me a job — one that would include bossing a lot of workmen and selling goods."

"H'm! And if you found the financiers, how would

you persuade them you could be useful?"

"You can safely leave that to me, father." Mab passed him his cup. It was white with a dark blue band and gold edge, an ordinary cup. Harry looked at it with disfavour. "I say, mother, can't I have something a little larger?"

Mrs. King smiled, indulgent. She was glad to see that mop of black hair in its old place at the table. Albert was a pleasant son-in-law, waited on her, ran errands, but against her own boys he seemed to her colourless. She was willing that Harry, so newly returned, should be considered.

"Why, yes!" she said. "Mabel, will you - "

"If Henry has a swedgeling cup, mother, there won't be enough tea to go round." She turned to her brother. "You must put up with what you've got."

"All right," said he, and the long lips went up at the corners. To have got him what he wanted wouldn't have hurt her. He looked across the table at Swinton, eating with relish food that was a gift.

"How long?"

"And how long," said he, "are you going to sponge on our old man?"

TIT

In a corner of the attic cupboard lay, forgotten, a pair of the graduated dumb-bells Harry had had made for the display of long ago. He found them that evening when he went to bed and he took them out, even played with them for a few minutes. Good to feel he was still the strong man, the man with the fourteen-inch forearm. The years had dropped like stones into a pool, they had vanished as if they had never been.

He shook himself out of his clothes. Six movements and he was in bed, in the old bed with the broken knob. How short the time since he had last lain there! Was it farther back than yesternight? Between then and now he had dreamed of India, Africa, New Zealand, but it had only been a dream. He was back in England, and that was reality.

He felt that he was come to stay. To stay? Well, for a time, and during that time he would make things hum. For this had he been spared, to this end chosen. The mists were beginning to clear. He would make things hum here in England, make them hum mightily.

[&]quot;I think you were at the works with me?"

[&]quot;Towards the end of your time."

[&]quot;Ah, yes. Are you still there?"

[&]quot;Sorry to say I'm out of a job."

[&]quot;Been out long?"

[&]quot;Er - er -" He appeared to consider.

[&]quot;I can't exactly say. Let me see -"

[&]quot;It isn't your business, Henry," snapped his sister, but Henry took no notice.

He planned a crusade against Socialists, Little Englanders, people who had been born tired. He was instinct with energy, only anxious to make a start. A nuisance that nights should intervene between day and day.

IV

Mrs. King, nursing her chill, was breakfasting in bed, and by the time Harry came down Mr. King was on his way to the office.

A brisk Harry, the kindlier for a good night's rest, entered the dining-room, but his brow clouded when he caught sight of Swinton. The fellow should have been out looking for work.

Mab passed her brother a cup of coffee. "There are eggs and bacon," she said, looking at the clock, "but I don't know that they are hot. Breakfast here is at eight."

"Looks like it," said Harry, with a glance at Swinton,

who was still eating.

Mab smiled to herself. She had brooded over her husband's discomfiture until she had found a way of avenging it. She might not like Albert's being out of work, but it was not for Harry to come "butting in." Sponge? Albert was not the only one who would sponge if he could.

By Harry's plate lay a folded paper. Mab had busied herself writing and blotting it. When she heard Harry's step on the stairs she had put it ready for him and gone back to her place.

"What's that?" Albert had asked.

"Never you mind. It's between me and Henry."

"You take care, Mab."

"It's only a little practical joke."

Albert had shaken his head. "Practical jokes are annoying."

"Well, he shouldn't talk about sponging."

Harry had helped himself to eggs and bacon and had begun his breakfast before he noticed the paper.

"What's this?" said he.

For a moment Mab wondered whether she had been wise. Harry in the flesh was formidable. But, after all, it was only a joke.

"You talked so big last night about not sponging on father," she said.

He stared. "Well?"

"So I made out your account."

The paper was a bill for food and lodging for one day! For a moment Harry saw red. Into his mind slid the remembrance that upstairs in his trunk lay the axe with which he had squared the logs for his shack at Orea. He left like using it on the chairs and table.

He was beside himself with rage.

Yet, cutting across his rage was the conviction that Mab would not care — he and she had been shaped from the same block; moreover, the chairs and table were not hers but his father's. Heavenly to let yourself go, to chop and smash and utterly destroy; but not so heavenly if the onlookers only laughed at you.

Mab, looking at him with eyes as hard as his own, would say, "When you have finished, Henry," or "Dad will be pleased."

No, he wouldn't chop up the furniture, but he was very angry, also he was hurt.

He looked at his sister, looked reproachfully. "After ten years," he said.

"It was only a joke," protested Mab, but a joke at Harry's expense was no joke. He pushed back his plate and rose.

"You crackpot - " she began.

Harry turned on his brother-in-law. He might not be able to overawe Mab, but Albert was of a softer make. "Look here," he said rising, "I'm going out of this house, here and now. But I'll keep this paper and I'll never forget the welcome my sister gave me after I'd been away ten years, never. As for you, Swinton, see you find a job and jolly smart, or I'll come back and kick you out of this. You're not going to live on the old man, so don't you think it; and if I catch you trying to get round him to alter his will I'll break your neck." With his right fist he hit the palm of the other hand, and Swinton, wishing he had more self-control, yet jumped. Harry's gestures were so forcible!

"I'll give you a fortnight, and, wherever I am, if you have not got work by then I'll come back."

Pulling silver out of his pocket, he counted down the exact sum entered on the bill.

"Don't be such an idiot," cried Mab. "I tell you it was a joke. As to my husband, he had an offer of a job this morning — they want him back at the works; so you can put that in your pipe and smoke it."

Harry took no notice; he did not, in fact, believe she spoke the truth. "I don't cadge," he said, continuing to glare at Swinton. "I'm no yattering charity child. Joke?" He turned at last and looked at his sister.

"A pretty joke," he said.

V

To Harry, in his London lodgings, came a paper from New Zealand containing an account of wedding festivities. Kitty Gray had married the young accountant with the thin legs. She was now Mrs. Franks.

A month after he had sailed!

So much for constancy! He felt sorry for himself as one who had been doubly betrayed. Margaret dead, Kitty married — and he, who had loved them, alone in diggings at the top of a dingy London house in a dreary, blackened street. Never had he been so friendless, so lonely.

True, the woman who kept the lodgings -

Also the waitress at the restaurant he favoured -

Also Black Jane, the housekeper at the club; but he did not like her because she harried the cashier, who also — yes, she had even asked him to take her to a theatre.

Now he came to think of it, too, there was Katie Behenna — also Miss Wilson.

Still, he was lonely.

The Dorothys and Jessies and Annies, each had the same ulterior motive: they were looking for a man who would provide them with bread-tickets. What had they to give in return? Nothing that Harry wanted.

What did he want?

Well, he certainly did not want to spend his time — waste his time — making love.

He got more of that sort of thing offered him free, gratis, and for nothing than he could do with.

He was a bit fed up with it, wanted something different.

Yes — what he wanted, what for years he had been trying to find, what he thought he had found in Margaret, was a woman who was not out for herself, not "on the make," a woman who was not a getter but a giver.

His simple need was for a woman who would give all

and ask nothing in return.

She was a little difficult to find.

Meanwhile he walked with the Maggies and Elsies and Marions; but he walked warily.

VI

Harry found work in London as traveller for an engineering firm. The salary was small and the prospects poor, but for a month he had tramped the pavements of the great city without finding employment, and he remembered Johannesburg.

He stayed with Patterson and Beale for a half-year; then, hearing of a job that would suit him better, returned to the railway town.

He could not go home, for though Swinton was now in regular employment, he and his wife still lived at No. 14 Parkside. Until it suited Harry's convenience to forgive his sister he would foster his grudge. Meantime it provided him with a reason for lodging in the town and for bestowing on his parents only as much of his time as he saw fit.

He had gone back to the rooms he had once shared with Jack Tremaine. Jack's mother, deprived of her own lamb (for Jack had gone to South America), made Harry welcome. His occupation of the rooms would give her something to do, help her to tide over the empty months and years between Jack's going and his return.

She would mother Harry, feed him on the fat of the land — on good Cornish junkets, on baked rabbit, on potato-cakes.

And Harry liked it — for a little.

But — the same rooms, the same furniture, the same sort of work as when he and Jack were together. On the whole it was dull. He began to wish something might happen.

The one mood of Harry's that was constant!

On the breakfast-table one morning he found among his letters another newspaper, a newspaper which reminded him of Kitty and Kitty's wedding. It bore the Christchurch postmark, it was addressed in Kitty's round writing.

He realized as he slit the cover that the image of Kitty, all claws and softness, was growing faint. Only natural when you thought how badly she had behaved, marrying like that after what she had said. It was enough to make a man lose faith in womanhood.

The corner of one sheet was turned down. A blue pencil-mark had been set against a modest announcement among the births. "To Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Franks, of Waironga, a son, Ernest Henry (premature)."

Really? Well, it was all right. She was doing her duty to the Empire. A son? A vague sense of disappointment crept over Harry. So Kitty had a son. He shouldn't have thought she would have borne sons, not Kitty. Well, well — she had his best wishes. Good luck to her and many returns of the day.

She had called the little chap Henry? Then she had not forgotten their fortnight together. Jolly of her to make him a sort of godfather. He must send the youngster a mug or a spoon or something.

Kitty a mother! The Kitty who — he lost himself in agreeable recollections. What a long time ago it seemed! Nine — no, ten months. He looked at the date of Ernest Henry's birth. Nine months after —

Suddenly he grew hot, hot in a queer, uncomfortable, yet ecstatic way. The blood beat in his temples.

No, nonsense, it could not be, and yet -

Premature?

Was that why she had sent him the announcement? Could it be?

Why else?

He threw back his head chuckling. The little cat, she had known how to take care of herself and Ernest Henry! Fine! He would never have thought Kitty, little fluffy Kitty, had had it in her.

For a moment he rendered homage. He had caught, among the cloud-drifts, a gleam of light. Kitty's will, purpose, inscrutability, flashed out at him. She had used him, she had done as she would, she had been silent.

He was a little awed.

Suddenly he began to doubt.

He was a fool, just that. He had made up a fine story but it was all bunkum.

Kitty was Kitty!

She wasn't the sort that leaves you guessing; during their last talk she would have hinted —

Well, she hadn't.

There might have been reasons! He sat down to his breakfast and found that he was hungry; found that, though he had not liked to acknowledge it, he was also happy — extremely happy!

If Kitty had told him he would have married her, Mar-

garet or no - certainly.

Could it be possible that she had not trusted him to do the straight thing? He did not know what her experience had been. Probably some man had let her down, let her down badly. If she had been any judge of faces she might have known that he was different.

A mistake to lump all men together!

A fellow who could leave a woman to face the music was a lousy scab, that's what he was.

A son!

With a thrill, Harry remembered Richard's children,

the baby who had clasped little pink fingers about a big hookey thumb.

He had envied Richard.

He lost himself in a dream: the child — the child he would never see. Never? What nonsense! Some day he would go back to New Zealand and hunt up Ernest Henry. Would he know him? In a room full of boys — he visualized him in a schoolroom — would he be able to spot him, to say with certainty, "That's the one! That's mine!"

Kitty ought to have let him know. A man, a father, had rights.

Yet he depends on a woman's acknowledgment of his parenthood for those rights! Not a pleasant state of affairs: belittling. Henry wondered why the Ruler of the Universe should have permitted it.

"Aren't you rather late this morning?" Mrs. Tremaine put her old, still handsome head round the door, and Harry wished that he might have told her his news. He mustn't, of course, it would not do; and, after all, it was only a guess.

But he felt pretty sure.

"I'm not going to the works today."

She scanned his face. He did not look ill. "Bad news?"

" Er - no."

He loafed about the room, whistling a song, one the men had sung round camp fires, a song about "home" and "mother." Yes, he felt pretty sure. The fact of his fatherhood was like a fire at which he was warming his hands, warming his heart. He was filled with happiness, he glowed. If that old pumper of his were to give out now, this very moment, something of him would still

live on. The miracle of birth held him entranced. Flesh of his flesh, speaking with his voice, looking on the world with his eyes, yet some one of whom he might — save for Kitty's guarded message — have never heard!

The very existence of his son might have been kept from

him. As it was, the boy was a stranger.

So near and yet a stranger.

The closest of relationships and yet it could not be acknowledged. Something wrong there. He wanted his son to know him, be proud of him.

But the boy would be brought up in New Zealand, would

bear another name, call another man "father."

No catch in that!

Harry imagined the youngster was learning to walk, to read, to fight: developing the traits of his true sire. He should have had a hand in the lad's upbringing. A boy's best friend is his father.

"My son," said Harry rather mournfully. He had been cheated of his rights.

VII

Too restless to remain long indoors, he sauntered, after dinner, into the town. The weather being fine, Main Street was filled with shoppers. Harry regarded them with an air of benevolence. They were mostly women, they were wasting their husbands' hard-earned money on things they did not want, but what did it matter? Money was not everything.

A little boy, thin and ragged, was staring into a pastry-cook's window. Harry gave him a penny. "Run in and buy yourself a bun."

He could not bear to think of a child hungry. If ever

his dream-fortune materialized he would endow an orphanage. All children ought to have a good home, good school-

ing, the opportunity to make a good living.

"Why, it's Harry King!" Mrs. Drummond stopped and held out her hand, and he knew that he was glad to see her. She was, if not a friend, at least a friendly acquaintance; she was a pal. He looked from Mrs. Drummond to her daughter, looked at Susie's round dimpling face, at her plump, matronly figure — regular little pouter-pigeon."

"Oh, Harry, I'm so glad it's you! You've never seen

baby?"

"I want to." Harry knew the other children, had ascended to their nursery now and then for a "roughhouse,"

but baby was new.

"They are just ahead with nurse." She quickened her steps, hastening after a smart young woman in butcher-blue. The young woman was wheeling a perambulator by which walked two little boys. To Mrs. Gage's dismay, baby, who until that moment had been cooing and blowing bubbles, had, as nurse said, "just dropped off."

"What a nuisance!" said baby's mother. She stooped over the perambulator. "Honey-lamb's little chin is

quite hidden, such a ducky chin!"

"Stir it up," said Harry, "I want to see it properly."

"Indeed I won't, you Goth. What an idea!"

"What is it? A boy?"

"Why, Harry, can't you see her bonnet and the pink bows? Of course she's a girl."

"Only a girl." Harry felt important and superior. He had a son.

"Tom said he'd divorce me if I had another boy. He wanted a girl." She tucked the cover closer about the sleeping baby. "My blossom!"

"Oh, she's a daisy," said Harry gaily. "What's her name?"

"We called her after mother — Ursula — Ursula Mary. I think one ought to hand on family names."

"Yes," said Harry, but with a sudden loss of gaiety. The name he wanted to hand on was King.

Ernest Henry Franks!
It was simply damnable.

VIII

" Are you busy?"

" No, I've taken the day off."

"Then come and have tea with us at the Geisha."

"And drink to your bright eyes? Rather!"

"You remember what a stuffy hole it was? The Humbys were too old to run it properly. Now they've got a manager, a really smart woman, and everybody drops in of an afternoon for tea. It is more like a club than a tea-shop."

The café was a large room with a beamed ceiling and panelled walls, the darkness of which had been relieved by strips of mirror. Table-cloths, china, flower-vases were scrupulously clean and fresh, and in the scheme of colour white predominated, but with the white was always a sug-

gestion of purple.

"Isn't the place improved?" said Susie over her shoulder, as they made their way to a table which commanded the room, but Harry was himself looking back and did not hear. Near the door was a red-brown mahogany cage with clear glass walls in which sat a young woman. Harry, walking up the room in the wake of Mrs. Drummond and her daughter, had glanced in at the crystal window, had met a soft and serious gaze.

He was looking back in the hope of meeting it again. "It is odd," said Mrs. Drummond, as a neat waitress with white apron and purple bows brought their tea, "that we should have met you today, Harry, for this morning I was turning out my desk and I found a copy of that old horoscope I did for you. I was noticing the date of your birth."

"Seventeenth of October," said Harry.

"The last chapter of Proverbs has thirty-one verses, and each verse is said to describe the person born on that day of the month. I was curious and looked up yours. It was: 'She girdeth her loins with strength and maketh strong her arms.'"

"But, mother," said Susie, "I thought for a man the date of his birth in Proverbs showed what sort of a wife

he would have."

"They say so, but the seventeenth verse seemed descriptive of Harry; it may, of course, be descriptive of the sort of woman he should marry."

"I don't want strength in a wife, I want sweetness." Mrs. Drummond looked at him thoughtfully. Would any one hold him? She doubted it. "I wonder if you know what you want?"

"A man," said Harry, "wants peace in his home." He had shifted his chin so that, without appearing to stare, he could watch the cage.

"You enjoy strife."

"I'm afraid you don't really know me, Mrs. Drummond. I've led a wandering sort of life, but all the time I've looked forward to having a home of my own. I've a strong domestic side."

"No - really?" What next would be say?

"I'm a lonely beggar." He was so sorry for himself that his eyes watered. He was indeed alone in the world.

No one cared what became of him; if he died tomorrow no one would grieve. What a state of affairs! "I'm not so young as I was." Fancy painted a picture of advancing years, of senility, an old man without ties, without descendants — ay, there was the rub, without descendants! Richard had children. James had a youngster, he had heard that even Mab was hoping. It wasn't fair that he, Harry, should have only the bantling that he could not claim. "Really, Mrs. Drummond, I can think of nothing that would give me greater, more real happiness than to settle down, to settle here where I was born; to give up wandering in order to get what other men have — a home, my own sticks of furniture — " He smiled but did not complete the sentence — Harry was always modest.

"Who is the lady?"

Having but that moment seen her, having as yet no idea of her name, he could not say.

"I'll tell you when I know."

"I'm glad you think of settling down," Mrs. Drummond said, and Susie echoed her words. But she was not glad. Happily married, a proud mother, she would yet have preferred Harry to remain a bachelor. Though she no longer loved him, she remembered.

"I want a home," repeated the rolling stone. He wanted more than a home, he wanted a family — a number of dark heads all bearing a strong resemblance to Harry

King.

"Poor Harry!" said Susie softly, "yes, of course!"
The big room was filling rapidly. At a table near the cage sat a Dane whom Harry knew slightly. Jansen was manager of the margarine works. He was drinking tea and he was looking at the cage. It was evident he did

not care who saw his preoccupation with it. Harry felt a sudden desire to bat this innocent, unsuspecting person between the eyes — "a bald-headed coot, old enough to be her father."

"This place is very different from what it was," he began, turning to Susie.

"That is due to the manager," she indicated the cage, "Mrs. Roslyn."

" Mrs?"

"A widow," explained Mrs. Drummond, "a widow with one little boy."

"Looks young for that," but at the information his heart had leaped. Her motherhood added to her value in his eyes. It was as if she had said: "See what I can do. I have done it once and I can do it again." In him a current of thought was running parallel with one of emotion. Mrs. Roslyn was bonnie, a big bonnie woman; he had never seen any one he admired so much. She was emphatically his style.

"Her name is Belle. Suitable, isn't it?" said Mrs. Drummond. "She is one of those capable people who make you realize that at her own sort of work a woman can always earn a living. Her husband died last year, and though she had no special training, she offered for

this job and got it."

So she had to make a living for herself and her boy,

had she? Harry admired capability.

"The Humbys," continued Mrs. Drummond, "are so pleased they talk of adopting her, but," she smiled "it won't be long before she has a home of her own."

"She is engaged to Mr. Jansen," said Susic, and was

glad to say it.

"Ah!" said Harry, and went on with his tea. En-

gaged was she, and to the bald-headed coot? — engaged before even she met him, Harry? A mistake to be in such a hurry.

Not that he wanted to marry. Well then, he did and he didn't. He wanted, when that old pumper of his gave way, to leave behind a bit of himself, and that bit must bear his name, must be recognizable as his.

Ridiculous that illegitimate children belong to the mother, have her surname.

Also he would like to have a home - for a time.

As things were, life was dull.

To enter the lists against Jansen would be exciting, give him something to think about, to do.

He was already planning his campaign. He would say good-bye to Mrs. Drummond and Susie at the door of the café and come back for — well, for his stick.

A few words with the manager.

Then he would hang about till the Geisha closed. When Mrs. Roslyn appeared at the side door she would find him waiting.

He would beg to be allowed to see her home.

A bit of courting, eventually a house of his own and, upstairs, rooms filled as Susie had filled hers. Boys — Susie had two boys —

Mrs. Drummond beckoned to a waitress and paid the bill. Harry followed his hostess out of the café, trying, as he passed the mahogany cage, to catch Mrs. Roslyn's soft hazel eye. But the manager was writing busily and did not look up.

What a sweep of dark lashes, what a bloomy cheek!

"Thanks so much, Mrs. Drummond. Bother! I must have left my stick behind. If you'll excuse me —"

"Here it is, Harry. I noticed you had left it."

Harry's hard face relaxed. "Done!" and he chuckled.
"Never mind her," soothed Mrs. Drummond. "You be off back!"

And Harry turned without a word.

IX

He had no time to lose. Engaged to Jansen? After all, a thing wasn't worth having unless you had to fight for it.

You wanted what other men wanted; not for its own sake but because they wanted it. And you wanted it just as long as you had to fight in order to keep it.

That was the fun of it—the fighting, not the purse and the side-stakes.

Harry thrilled to this adventure as he had to every other from the day he called "Bogey," from the day he first drew breath.

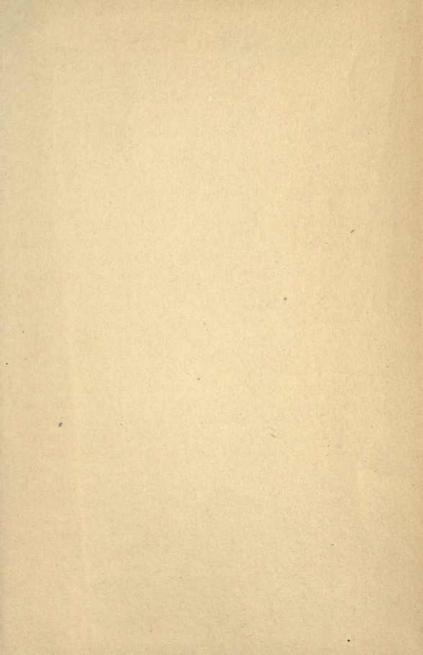
He wanted Mrs. Roslyn because Jansen wanted her but also for what she could give. His instinct was clamorous.

He had nothing to offer, neither money nor position.

Yet he would win.

He knew it before he saw Mrs. Roslyn again, before he crossed the threshold of the café.

Damn Kitty! Here was something better worth his while.





25

C SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY

A 000 121 164 8

